

Spring 2020

## **A Conductor's Guide to the Da Vinci Requiem by Cecilia McDowall**

Jantsen Blake Touchstone

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A CONDUCTOR'S GUIDE TO THE DA VINCI REQUIEM BY CECILIA McDOWALL

by

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Musical Arts in

Conducting

School of Music

University of South Carolina

2020

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## DEDICATION

To my wife, Amy Touchstone, for your endless support, patience, love, and sacrifice. Your support, patience and understanding have allowed me to complete this project; I thank you.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would begin by thanking Cecilia McDowall for writing such wonderful choral music and allowing such access to her life and thoughts. Also, Neil Ferris, director of the Wimbledon Choral Society, for your hospitality and willingness to share your thoughts on the *Da Vinci Requiem* and on Cecilia McDowall's music. I would also like to thank Jennifer Williams for her tireless assistance in transcribing the interviews.

Personally, I would like to thank my wife, Amy, for her continued love, sacrifice, and understanding. I would like to thank my parents, Ronnie and Dr. Karen Touchstone as well as Jim and Robin Grantham, for the unyielding financial, spiritual, and emotional support that has sustained me through this endeavor.

Professionally, I would like to thank the many music teachers who have shaped my journey and on whose shoulders I stand. Among them are Deborah Barfoot, Rebekah Bowling, Kaye Scott, Chris Smith, Curt Smith, Kathy Montgomery, Catherine Pannell, Shawn Morgan, Dr. Jamie Meaders, and the entire faculty of the Mississippi College Music Department. I am also grateful to my professors at USC for the knowledge and support they have given me; especially Dr. Julie Hubbert, Dr. Sarah Williams, Dr. J. Daniel Jenkins, Dr. Andrew Gowan, Dr. Jabarie Glass, and Dr. Larry Wyatt. Finally, I offer special thanks to Dr. Alicia Walker for her continued mentorship and dedicated investment in my growth as a conductor, musician, and human-being.

## ABSTRACT

The *Da Vinci Requiem* by Cecilia McDowall (b.1951) is a seven-movement work scored for soprano and bass soloists, mixed chorus, and orchestra and was premiered on May 7, 2019 in Southbank Center in London, UK by the Wimbledon Choral Society under the direction of Neil Ferris. The thirty-five-minute work is the largest of the two major choral-orchestral works in McDowall's oeuvre which includes approximately 115 choral works. The focus of this study is to provide a guide to the performance of the work. The study provides scholarship into the life and work of Cecilia McDowall, one of the United Kingdom's foremost living composers. Her music is becoming well-known among choral musicians and deserves the examination provided within this document.

Chapter one is an introduction discussing the need for the study with related literature. Chapter two provides a brief biography of Cecilia McDowall and an overview of her compositional style. Chapter three discusses the history and development of the work and its context within her oeuvre. Chapter four provides a guide to the structure of the work and a discussion performance and teaching considerations from a conductor's perspective.

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## FOREWORD

This document is part of the dissertation requirement for the Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Conducting. The remaining portion of the dissertation consists of four public recitals. Copies of the recital programs are bound at the end of this paper, and recordings of the recitals are on file in the Music Library.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The *Da Vinci Requiem* by Cecilia McDowall (b.1951) is a seven-movement choral orchestral work which premiered on May 7, 2019 in Southbank Centre in London, UK. The thirty-five-minute work is the largest of the two major choral-orchestral works in McDowall's oeuvre which includes approximately 115 choral works. This study provides a brief biography of Cecilia McDowall, the history and development of the work, an examination of the structure of the work, and a guide to performance considerations from the conductor's perspective.

Cecilia McDowall is a celebrated British composer with special recognition for her choral works as the winner of the 2014 British Composer Award. McDowall is particularly lauded as possessing "a communicative gift that is very rare in modern music."<sup>1</sup> In an interview with Rhinegold publishing, she states:

I really enjoy looking for suitable texts for choral music—it's half the fun of it. It does take time to find just the 'right' words and I do feel they must be 'good' words—words which express an idea economically and with beauty. Sometimes I commission poets to write for me, and that kind of collaboration is always stimulating in what can be primarily a solitary pursuit. And always when setting a text I try to get as far into the meaning of the words as I can"<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cecilia McDowall, "Biography," *Cecilia McDowall* (blog), accessed March 25, 2019, <https://ceciliamcdowall.co.uk/biography/>.

<sup>2</sup> Cecilia McDowall, "Encounters," *Choir & Organ; London, Eng.*, February 2017.

It is this thoughtfulness concerning the setting of texts which highlights the “communicative gift” which characterizes her choral compositions. McDowall’s fascination with unique texts has sparked the composition of works such as *City Almanac* (2006), *Shipping Forecast* (2011), *Everyday Wonders: The Girl from Aleppo* (2018), and the new *Da Vinci Requiem* (2019).

The *Da Vinci Requiem* synthesizes the texts of Leonardo da Vinci concerning his philosophies of life and death with the text of the Latin Requiem Mass. The da Vinci notebooks are sentimental to the composer since the translated notebooks were given as a gift from her mother to her father early in their marriage. Cecilia McDowall spent a time as a young girl reading this work and becoming familiar with the philosophies of da Vinci and the text itself.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the selected da Vinci texts were a logical source for incorporation with the Latin Requiem texts since the premiere of the commissioned work was performed in conjunction with the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Leonardo da Vinci’s death. The work was commissioned by the Wimbledon Choral Society under the direction of Neil Ferris. Mr. Ferris is the chorus director of the Royal College of Music, associate director of the London Symphony Chorus, and the director of the BBC Symphony Chorus. The work is scored for soprano and baritone solos, SATB chorus, and orchestra. The soloists for the premiere were Kate Royal and Rodderick Williams with the London Philharmonia orchestra. The premiere of the work took place on the evening of May 7, 2019 at Royal Festival Hall in London, England.

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<sup>3</sup> Cecilia McDowall, Interview by Jantsen Touchstone, Personal Interview, London, UK, May 9, 2019.

## Need for Study

The study will explore the composer's life, her compositional style as demonstrated in the *Da Vinci Requiem*, the genesis of the work, and specific conducting considerations vital to the preparation and performance of the work from the perspective of the conductor. Cecilia McDowall's music is widely known throughout the United Kingdom; however, only her works for upper and women's voices are well-known in the United States. This study aims to increase the visibility of the composer in the United States particularly among conductors of mixed voice ensembles.

## Related Literature

One dissertation, Joseph Patrick Gray's "Professional Recording of Cecilia McDowall's Works for Trumpet and Keyboard," has been written about Cecilia McDowall's music. Gray wrote the document during his doctoral study at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The document only provides the brief biography of Cecilia McDowall as found on her website. Gray's research primarily describes the pieces he recorded and the process of recording. The document also contains a transcription of an interview he conducted with McDowall regarding the trumpet pieces he recorded. However, Gray does not provide a descriptive analysis of McDowall's style or a musical analysis of the recorded works.<sup>4</sup> The only primary sources containing biographical information about the composer are her personal website and an interview entitled *Encounters* with Clare Stevens of Rhinegold Publishing Ltd. In this interview, McDowall discusses her return to school after her children were grown, which would lead her to

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<sup>4</sup> Joseph Patrick Gray, "Professional Recording of Cecilia McDowall's Works for Trumpet and Keyboard" (D.M.A. Dissertation, The University of Wisconsin - Madison, 2015), <http://search.proquest.com/pqdtglobal/docview/1751296448/abstract/1D52BB8909FE482DPQ/1>.

study with Adam Gorb, Joseph Horovitz, and Robert Saxton.<sup>5</sup> Through these composers, her pedagogical lineage can be traced to stalwarts of experimental twentieth-century composition on the continent. Stalwarts such as Luciano Berio, notable for electronic and aleatoric composition, and Pierre Boulez, a leader in integral serialism. More importantly, it can also be traced to Sir Charles Villiers Stanford, Hubert Parry, Ralph Vaughan Williams, Gustav Holst, and Herbert Howells. The work of these composers in the revitalization of English music in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is commonly referred to as the English Musical Renaissance. The English Musical Renaissance was less experimental compositional trend in contrast to the dominant musical styles on the continent. Twentieth-century English music was characterized by modally influenced melodic and pitch content, Tudor-school influenced counterpoint, and other pastoral and nationalistic influences. McDowall's music may be considered a continuation of this movement given her pedagogical proximity to their work and influence. McDowall is only three teachers removed from Stanford, Parry, Vaughan Williams, and Howells through her study with Joseph Horovitz. McDowall's relationship to these English composers is important because her work is measured against their achievements in the CD and performance reviews which form the bulk of literature written about her work. "English Pastoralism in Ralph Vaughan Williams' Concerto for Oboe and Strings," a dissertation written Kadee Bramlett during her study at the

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<sup>5</sup> McDowall, "Encounters."

University of Oklahoma, was helpful in illuminating the musical elements which characterize English Pastoralism, a movement which is difficult to define.<sup>6</sup>

Paul Conway, a writer for *Musical Opinion* and *Tempo*, two classical music magazines based in the UK, has reviewed several of her premieres and also CDs which contain her works. Conway's performance review of McDowall's *Seventy Degrees Below* (2007), a work for Tenor solo and orchestra, is one such review that makes the comparison between her work and the work of Ralph Vaughan Williams, particularly his *Sinfonia Antarctica* (1958) based on the same subject matter and featured alongside the premiere of McDowall's composition. In his review, Conway praises her "very personal, communicative use of the human voice" which is pitted against Vaughan Williams' "eerily disembodied wordless soprano solo."<sup>7</sup> Ultimately, Conway elevates McDowall's work to the same level of Vaughan Williams, noting that *Seventy Degrees Below* "merits an independent future concert life."<sup>8</sup>

Joe Riley also compares her work with that of the English Renaissance composers in his review of her CD *Laudate, Radnor Songs, A Canterbury Mass, Five Seasons, and other works* for *Organist's Review*, the quarterly magazine of the UK-based Incorporated Association of Organists. In the review, Riley heaps high praise on McDowall's *Laudate* which:

shows the composer perfectly at ease with the sense of succession from older contemporaries. The medieval colourings here are reminiscent of the latter-day treatments, most notably William Matthias. *Laudate* places McDowall within the

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<sup>6</sup> Kadee Marie Bramlett, "English Pastoralism in Ralph Vaughan Williams' Concerto for Oboe and Strings" (D.M.A. Dissertation, University of Oklahoma - Norman, 2017), <https://shareok.org/handle/11244/50719>.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Conway, "Birmingham, Symphony Hall: Cecilia McDowall's 'Seventy Degrees Below Zero,'" *Tempo* 66, no. 261 (2012): 66.

<sup>8</sup> Conway, "Birmingham, Symphony Hall."

mainstream of wider British stylists, able to sit comfortably on CD miscellany collections alongside the Himalayan achievements of Vaughan Williams, Holst, or Howells.<sup>9</sup>

Robert Matthew-Walker, a writer for *Musical Opinion*, also elevates the status of Cecilia McDowall's music and defines her communicative style in his article entitled *Young British Composers: Cecilia McDowall* in December 2000. Matthew-Walker states, "she has something original and worthwhile to say, and she not only knows how to say it technically and artistically, but also naturally, speaking directly to an attentive audience without insulting their intelligence or their basic human sensitivities."<sup>10</sup>

McDowall's affinity for text as a source of compositional inspiration is even noted in reviews of her instrumental music. In a review of a CD of McDowall's instrumental works, Conway observes that for *Dance in the Dark Streets*, a work for strings and piano obbligato, drew inspiration from "poems about aspects of Scottish weather" while *Dancing Fish* was inspired by a Russian Fable written by Ivan Krylov and "quotes fragments of a Russian Folksong".<sup>11</sup> In a review of the same CD, Steven E. Ritter, a writer for the American Record Guide, notes McDowall's use of Douglas Dunn's poem *The Donkey's Ears* as the inspiration for *The Case of the Unanswered Wire*, a work for string quartet.

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<sup>9</sup> Joe Riley, "CD Reviews: Cecilia McDowell - 'Laudate,' 'Radnor Songs,' 'A Canterbury Mass,' 'Five Seasons' and Other Works," *Organists' Review; Stoke on Trent* 95, no. 4 (November 2009): 70.

<sup>10</sup> Robert Matthew-Walker, "Young British Composers: Cecilia McDowall," *Musical Opinion; Melton Mowbray*, December 2000.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Conway, "CD Reviews - Cecilia McDowall: 'Seraphim'; 'Dance the Dark Streets'; 'Dancing Fish'; 'Not Just a Place'; 'Dream City'; 'The Case of the Unanswered Wire,'" *Tempo* 60 (July 2006): 66–67.

The aforementioned articles note the merits of McDowall's musical work and also point to her unique affinity for text, both as a choral composer and as a source for inspiration in instrumental works. However, the current literature does not offer any investigation of her compositional style. This document will illuminate her style characteristics through the lens of the *Da Vinci Requiem*.

#### Delimitations of the Study

This study is not intended to provide an exhaustive biography of Cecilia McDowall's life and will be limited to the composer's musical activity. Furthermore, the discussion of McDowall's compositional stylistic characteristics will include only those evident in the *Da Vinci Requiem*, and will not reference the composer's larger body of work

#### Methodology

The goal of this study is to provide conductors a resource elucidating the scoring, structure, motivic connections, tonality, harmony, rhythm, and the marriage of text and music as determined through score study, attendance at the world premiere, performance experience, and an interview with the composer. The study also provides a portrait of the composer's style through the lens of the *Da Vinci Requiem*. The study of McDowall's *Da Vinci Requiem* has grown out of my journey with the piece, beginning with the trip to England to witness the premiere and interview the composer. This experience was followed by my own performance of the South Carolina premiere of the work with the UofSC Graduate Vocal Ensemble on December 3, 2019. According to the composer's website, the US premiere took place on November 23, 2019 in Fairport, NY with the Genesee Choir and Orchestra. The 2019 score printed by Oxford University Press has been used for the study of the work. The secondary sources include the composer's



website, CD reviews, performance reviews, and articles on philosophical content of the Leonardo da Vinci's notebooks. The primary focus of this research centers on score study and an interview with Cecilia McDowall.

Personal interviews with the composer and Neil Ferris were recorded. Printed transcripts of the interviews are included as Appendix A and Appendix B, respectively. The information from these interviews regarding the commission, composition, and performance of the *Da Vinci Requiem* and the composer's life and style has been invaluable to completing the study.

## CHAPTER 2

### BIOGRAPHY OF CECILIA MCDOWALL

Cecilia McDowall was born in 1951 and currently resides in London, UK. She is the recipient of the 2014 British Composer Award for Choral Music for *Night Flight*. She has been featured on albums by elite choirs such as The Sixteen, BBC Singers, and the Choir of Queen's College. McDowall was awarded an honorary doctorate from Portsmouth University in 2013 and named honorary fellow of the Royal School of Church Music along with Bob Chilcott in 2017.

She was raised in a musical and academic environment. Her father, Harold Clarke, was principal flutist of the Royal Opera in the 1950s. Her mother, Margaret Scott Clarke, worked as an aircraft factory inspector for the Ministry of Aircraft during WWII and later became a linguist and language teacher, specializing in French and later Russian. Cecilia began playing piano at the age of five and began composing shortly thereafter through improvisation at the piano. She first studied music at the University of Edinburgh, graduating with a Bachelor of Music with Honors in 1972. She continued her study of piano and composition at Trinity College of Music (now Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance), graduating in 1975. She began teaching at Trinity College of Music in 1982 and continued teaching there until 2008 when she began composing full-time. She also taught at the Yehudi Menuhin School for Gifted Children from 1987-1989. She was encouraged by her father to compose “tuneful” music for

beginning flute students during this time.<sup>12</sup> When her children had reached an age of relative independence, she returned to school for a master's degree in concert music at the London College of Music, graduating in 1999. During her master's degree, she won numerous composition competitions and was employed as the composer-in residence for the Fibonacci Sequence ensemble, a dectet featuring strings, winds, brass, piano, and percussion. She was also commissioned to compose for the Concordia Foundation, an organization created by Gillian Humphreys, devoted to nurturing the talent of young musicians. She is also the visiting composer at Dulwich College, a school in Dulwich, London named the 2019 Independent School of the Year for the Performing Arts by Independent School Parent magazine.

When asked what led her to become a composer, she mentioned a Gustav Holst quote in which he states, "Never compose anything unless the not composing of it becomes a positive nuisance to you."<sup>13</sup> She mentioned that her compositional life would not have been possible without the support of her father in her early years, and the financial support of her husband, particularly when making the transition from being a teacher to a full-time composer. McDowall's output includes 4 stage works, 8 works for solo instruments, 8 works for solo voice, 11 educational works for solo flute study, 15 works for orchestra, 21 works for chamber ensembles, 21 works for winds, and 115 choral works. The larger choral works include *Stabat Mater* and the *Da Vinci Requiem*. The medium-sized choral works include *Shipping Forecast*, *Everyday Wonders: The Girl from Aleppo*, *Night Flight*, *A Time for All Seasons*, *A Fancy of Folksongs*, and

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<sup>12</sup> Cecilia McDowall, Interview by Jantsen Touchstone, Personal Interview, London, UK, May 9, 2019.

<sup>13</sup> McDowall, Interview.

*Magnificat*. The small works include *O Oriens*, *A Prayer to St. John the Baptist*, *A Winter's Night*, *When Time Is Broke*, *Standing As I Do Before God*, *Advent Moon*, and *I Know That My Redeemer Liveth*.

During our interview in May 2019, McDowall mentioned many composers throughout history that have influenced her style and compositional process. She discussed loving the rawness of the organum of Perotin and her particular affinity for the music of Tallis in the Tudor period. She cites Tallis as having “something deeper, more substantial” within his compositional style which affects her own.<sup>14</sup> “The bravery to delve into dark and profound places” is a feature that Neil Ferris, the conductor of the *Da Vinci Requiem* premiere, has mentioned as a hallmark of her work.<sup>15</sup> McDowall expressed her deep love for the music of Bach and conveyed her delight when Radio Three, the British classical station, played the complete works of Bach over a two-week period just before Christmas in 2005. McDowall did express an appreciation for the music of the Classical period, but that it is “not where her heart is”.<sup>16</sup> The orchestration of Strauss is an influence in her work from the nineteenth century. In the 20th century, Stravinsky is cited as a major influence. In addition, she mentioned an attraction to the “color and exoticism” of 20th-century composers including Debussy, Ravel, Bartok, and Messiaen.<sup>17</sup> The wind writing of Ligeti is another major influence she cited from the 20th century.

McDowall named her three composition teachers as important influences on her compositional style, while each teacher was markedly different. She hailed Joseph

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<sup>14</sup> McDowall, Interview.

<sup>15</sup> Neil Ferris, Interview by Jantsen Touchstone, Personal Interview, London, UK, May 6, 2019.

<sup>16</sup> McDowall, Interview.

<sup>17</sup> McDowall, Interview.

Horovitz as a master craftsman who helped her develop her approach to orchestration and “thinking imaginatively about instrumental color.”<sup>18</sup> In our interview, McDowall mentioned *Colour is the keyboard* which was commissioned by Helen Reid a pianist with synesthesia. Psychology Today states, “Synesthesia is a neurological condition in which stimulation of one sensory or cognitive pathway (for example, hearing) leads to automatic, involuntary experiences in a second sensory or cognitive pathway (such as vision).”<sup>19</sup> In the composition, McDowall employs the synesthetic perceptions of Wassily Kandinsky and the color chart of Alexander Scriabin to create the harmonic palette for the work. However, McDowall also noted her own observations concerning the colors inherent with the scale and certain keys. McDowall states:

I do see some things in color, yet I don’t think I’m a synesthete ... what I see is not consistent. But I do see the scale in my mind’s eye in color and know that what I see, others wouldn’t. It’s idiosyncratic. For me, A is green and B major, yellow, D major has to be blue and G is obviously orange! Oh and C Major is red”<sup>20</sup>

She also acknowledged that her perception of the various qualities of different keys inherently informs her decisions regarding choice of key in composition. She describes the *Sanctus*, the middle movement of the *Da Vinci Requiem* as the “apogee” of brightness within the work.<sup>21</sup> It is no surprise then that the movement written in G mixolydian, since McDowall associates the key of G with the color orange. While the first and last movements centered on the A octatonic scale she describes as dark, as she associates the key of A with the color green. In this context, McDowall’s conception of the requiem as a progression from darkness to light and back is given greater depth.

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<sup>18</sup> McDowall, Interview.

<sup>19</sup> McDowall, Interview.

<sup>20</sup> McDowall, Interview.

<sup>21</sup> McDowall, Interview.

She also studied composition briefly with Robert Saxton and mentioned that his “his thinking and mind go into such wild and extraordinary places which I think are extremely stimulating.”<sup>22</sup> The third teacher, Adam Gorb, is now head of composition at the Royal Northern College of Music. She credited Gorb helping to “[open] my ears to so many possibilities, ideas I just hadn’t thought of before”<sup>23</sup>

Through Joseph Horovitz, who studied at the Royal College of Music, her pedagogical lineage extends to prominent figures of the English Musical Renaissance such as Charles Villiers Stanford, Ralph Vaughan Williams, and Herbert Howells, as well as more progressive composition teachers such as Nadia Boulanger. She acknowledged that a subconscious compositional “genetic trail” does exist in her music connecting it with the great composers of England.<sup>24</sup> She also remarked that her music has been described as “[sounding] ‘English’ or ‘British’” and that she finds moment in her music that sound similar to Vaughan Williams.<sup>25</sup> Ferris identified one such moment as the use of semi-chorus in the *Agnus Dei* movement of the Requiem which texturally sounds much like the Vaughan Williams *Mass in G*. However, she does not feel limited to these influences but states that her “ear is open to so many different sound-worlds ... Baltic, Swedish, American, Middle Europe, Arabic.”

McDowall begins each choral composition by developing a concept of the impression she wants to leave with the listener. Once she has created a clear concept, she moves on to the “search for the text”. She states, “I love this part of the process when everything is possible! I often spend quite a bit of time on this and sometimes consult

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<sup>22</sup> McDowall, Interview.

<sup>23</sup> McDowall, Interview.

<sup>24</sup> McDowall, Interview.

<sup>25</sup> McDowall, Interview.

with one or two very knowledgeable friends to find the best access to texts.<sup>26</sup> In this aspect of composition, McDowall is particularly lauded as possessing “a communicative gift that is very rare in modern music.”<sup>27</sup> In an interview with Rhinegold publishing, she states:

I really enjoy looking for suitable texts for choral music – it’s half the fun of it. It does take time to find just the ‘right’ words and I do feel they must be ‘good’ words – words which express an idea economically and with beauty. Sometimes I commission poets to write for me, and that kind of collaboration is always stimulating in what can be primarily a solitary pursuit. And always when setting a text, I try to get as far into the meaning of the words as I can.<sup>28</sup>

For the *Da Vinci Requiem*, she turned to Nicholas Dakin, a personal friend and retired professor of literature, to compile a list of texts from the “Da Vinci Notebooks” that he felt would match well with the Latin requiem text. Once this list was compiled, she selected texts from the list to which she had the most immediate emotional and musical response, which is her general process for text selection. When discussing her approach to text setting, she states, “a text needs to be not only good but the kind that you have an immediate response to.”<sup>29</sup>

She also commissions poets to collaborate with her for compositions such as *Standing As I Do Before God* and *Shipping Forecast* with Sean Street, and with Tony Silvestri on an upcoming commission from the Kansas City Chorale titled *Pioneers of Sound*. She has collaborated with a number of other poets as well, including Angier Brock, Sheila Bryer, Kevin Cross-Holland, John Greening, Simon Mundy, Caroline Natzler, Alan Spence, and Dr. Joseph Spence.

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<sup>26</sup> McDowall, Interview.

<sup>27</sup> McDowall, “Biography.”

<sup>28</sup> McDowall, “Encounters.”

<sup>29</sup> McDowall, Interview.

It is this thoughtfulness concerning the setting of texts which highlights the “communicative gift” which characterizes her choral compositions. For vocal works, the text directly leads to musical elements such as tempo and other elements are chosen in an attempt to “get the most out of the text in terms of musical response.”<sup>30</sup> When asked about how literature became so important to her as a composer, she stated:

I think my approach to writing is more empirical than analytical ... perhaps that lends itself to being inspired verbally, visually, aurally? I tend not to write music of an abstract nature. I’m so often inspired by something historical, scientific, artistic. Like so many of us, I read much and find that so often literature inspires. When I find something which fascinates and inspires I often want to embed something of the original in the piece in the hope that it might encourage the listener to discover more.<sup>31</sup>

After selecting the text, the process of composition begins either with an idea that is then developed at the piano or with improvisation, which leads to a musical moment that she then captures and explores. When discussing her process of composing from the piano, she mentioned that great composers such as Stravinsky did the same and this is evident in elements such as the “stamping chord” in *The Rite of Spring* in which she states “you can see where the hand positions are.”<sup>32</sup>

She also states that she always uses manuscript paper which she feels allows her “freedom to change what [she’s] written” more so than the computer.<sup>33</sup> From this perspective, she also is keen on not copying and pasting music. She states, “Nothing wrong with a bit of copying and pasting, up to a point, but I find it stifles the creative

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<sup>30</sup> McDowall, Interview.

<sup>31</sup> McDowall, Interview.

<sup>32</sup> McDowall, Interview.

<sup>33</sup> McDowall, Interview.



process a bit.”<sup>34</sup> The philosophical aversion to exact repeats leads to a direct impact in her music, which rarely features a repeat without some slight variation, usually rhythmic.

In addition to her particular affinity for setting text, McDowall’s compositional style also features thoughtful voice-leading and awareness of writing music which is challenging but not insurmountable, particularly in works for non-professional choirs. As a singer, she is aware of the need for lines to be not only singable but also enjoyable to sing. She states:

When I write for the voice I sing everything through, all parts ... I always want to find out how it might feel to sing, how it lies on the voice, are there notes in the texture which will help other parts to pitch their notes, all that sort of thing. I prefer the idea of giving singers, if I can, an interesting line to sing. I feel choral music should bring enjoyment as well as interest in the part itself. (I’ve sung quite a few not terribly exciting alto parts in my time!) Of course, if we’re talking about renaissance music and polyphonic textures, there’s always plenty of interest there, but I think that there is more of a tendency today to think vertically, homophonic-style, which perhaps doesn’t encourage melodic writing in the same way. I’m also aware, the more difficult the choral music, the more time is needed to rehearse it. It’s a fine line between writing something to stretch and interest the performer and something which isn’t going to take hours to rehearse! If one needs to do a lot of rehearsal singers aren’t necessarily going to remember what was covered from one week to the next. I often try to write in a way which will be easier to recall.<sup>35</sup>

Neil Ferris, in a separate interview, mentioned several elements as hallmarks of McDowall’s compositional style. He lists “superb voice-leading with parts that are immediately singable but not saccharine, an awareness of providing enough challenge without being patronizing, a lightness of touch, an economy of ideas, and a willingness to go to dark and profound places.”<sup>36</sup> In addition, McDowall favors the use of modes and alternate scales as the basis for harmonic language in many of her compositions, with a particular thumbprint being the use of the lowered second and raised fourth scale degrees,

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<sup>34</sup> McDowall, Interview.

<sup>35</sup> McDowall, Interview.

<sup>36</sup> Ferris, Interview.

borrowed from the phrygian and lydian modes respectively. In our interview, she noted that she is drawn to the tension inherent within the combined lowered second scale degree and raised fourth scale degrees, and has employed the sound in *The Lord is Good* (2012), *Night Flight* (2014), *Everyday Wonders: The Girl from Aleppo* (2018), as well as the *Da Vinci Requiem* (2019).

## CHAPTER 3

### THE CONTEXT AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE WORK

An examination of the *Da Vinci Requiem* is best understood in the larger context of Cecilia McDowall's compositional journey. To that end, her larger choral works from 2003 to present will be discussed as hallmarks of the composer's development. A survey of McDowall's oeuvre reveals three unifying threads which characterize her large choral works, which in this chapter refers to compositions of more than fourteen minutes in length. The unifying links are a connection with English Pastoralism, a predilection for symmetrical structures, and the use of historic and scientific subjects for extra-musical association.

A connection with the English Pastoralism of the early twentieth century is one such unifying thread within her compositional voice. In her dissertation, Kadee Bramlett compiled a list of musical characteristics which define English Pastoralism.<sup>37</sup> The features include: frequent triple division of the beat and dotted rhythms, free and flexible pulse, metric flexibility in shifting from simple to compound meter, melodic lines with conjunct arch shapes which gradually ascend and descend, modally-inspired melodic and non-functional harmonic conventions, imitation of nature and animal sounds, a sense of harmonic stasis or simple harmonic patterns, the use of pedals, drones and rocking

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<sup>37</sup> Bramlett, "English Pastoralism in Ralph Vaughan Williams' Concerto for Oboe and Strings." 1-13.

accompanimental figures, and instrumentation.<sup>38</sup> The instrumentation which best reflects pastoralism is the use of flute, oboes, and horns reminiscent of the Italian *pifferari*. The *pifferari* were groups of shepherds from Campagna that used to frequent Rome during advent in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The *pifferari* would play shawms and bagpipes on the street before pictures of the Virgin Mary. The use of string-dominant orchestration is also a feature of English Pastoralism. A second unifying thread is McDowall's predilection for symmetrical structures of five or seven movements, with the interior movement serving as the apogee of the work. The use of historical or scientific subjects for extra-musical association is a third unifying thread.

An examination of Cecilia McDowall's output of large choral works also reveals her progression of growth as an artist and composer. McDowall's early works are predominantly commissions by provincial choral societies in England. As a composer who writes well to her brief, these works are quite beautiful but reflect the economy of ideas and accessibility appropriate to these ensembles. However, McDowall's more recent works have increased in difficulty and in artistic freedom as her commissions have become more high profile. Recent commissioners include the National Children's Choir of Great Britain and the Wimbledon Choral Society under the direction of Neil Ferris, who is also the director of the BBC Symphony Chorus. McDowall's music has also gained more international notoriety through the recordings of George Vass, who has commissioned works by McDowall with several choral societies, as well as the Kansas City Chorale and Phoenix Chorale. McDowall is currently working on *Pioneers of Sound*, a collaborative commission for McDowall and Anthony Silvestri for the Kansas City

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<sup>38</sup> Bramlett, 1-13.

Chorale. Conducted by Charles Bruffy, the Kansas City Chorale is one of the premier professional choirs in the United States. Undoubtedly, McDowall's trend toward more individualistic and unfettered artistic expression as evidenced in her most recent compositions will continue as her market for commissions continues to expand.

With an approximate length of thirty-five minutes, the *Da Vinci Requiem* is the largest choral orchestral work in Cecilia McDowall's output as of 2019 but is not McDowall's only large-scale choral work. She began composing substantial choral works in 2003 with a six-movement setting of the *Magnificat*, a foundational text for the Anglican liturgical tradition. McDowall's *Magnificat*, a commission by George Vass and the Finchley Choral Society of North London, is set for soprano and mezzo soprano solos, mixed chorus, and a chamber orchestra of 1 or 2 clarinets, bassoon, and strings. McDowall's propensity for phrygian and lydian modes is one of the features of the work which connects it with English Pastoralism and the *Da Vinci Requiem*.

The *Stabat Mater* (2005) is her second largest choral-orchestral work at thirty-minutes in length. *Stabat Mater* features baritone solo, two-part children's chorus, mixed chorus, and chamber orchestra of flute, clarinet, bassoon, 2 horns, harp, and strings. Several characteristics connect this work with McDowall's compositional voice and the *Da Vinci Requiem*. The first trait is its use of seven movement symmetrical construction. The Oxford University Press website description states:

The work comprises seven movements in a symmetrical structure from the impassioned choral opening, through two intense yet diverse baritone solos and contemplative plainchant chorales, to the stately finale uniting all the voices. The optimistic central movement, in a major tonality, may be performed by children's

choir or a semi-chorus of sopranos and altos from the main group. A plaintive meditation on the sorrows of the Virgin Mary as she stands by the Cross.<sup>39</sup>

The *Da Vinci Requiem* also employs seven-movement symmetrical construction with an “optimistic central movement, in a major tonality” which will be discussed in greater detail in chapter four of this document. A second unifying trait is McDowall’s characteristic use of the phrygian mode. McDowall also makes similar use of specific orchestral timbres. The fourth movement of the *Stabat Mater* employs an orchestral underlay of heavy strings and harp with solo wind writing above. This orchestral texture is one of the distinctive traits of English Pastoralism as identified by Bramlett.<sup>40</sup> The texture is nearly identical to the orchestration used for movement six of the *Da Vinci Requiem*. The two movements also share a static harmonic language and conjunct melodic contour, which are also features identified by Bramlett as unique to English Pastoralism.<sup>41</sup> Shared orchestral timbres also exist between the fifth movement of the *Stabat Mater* for baritone solo and a small section of the second movement of the *Da Vinci Requiem* for soprano solo. The two movements feature also feature soloistic writing for flute, oboe, clarinet, and horns over low static harmony in the harp and strings, and both favor the use of phrygian mode. The general melodic characters of the movements, however, are quite different with consummate lyricism in the *Sancta Mater* movement of the *Stabat Mater* and disparate angular lines for the majority of the *Virgin of the Rocks*

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<sup>39</sup> Oxford University Press, “*Stabat Mater*,” accessed March 24, 2020, <https://global.oup.com/academic/product/stabat-mater-9780193400498?cc=us&lang=en&#>.

<sup>40</sup> Bramlett, “English Pastoralism in Ralph Vaughan Williams’ Concerto for Oboe and Strings,” 1-13.

<sup>41</sup> Bramlett, “English Pastoralism in Ralph Vaughan Williams’ Concerto for Oboe and Strings,” 1-13.

movement of the *Da Vinci Requiem*, with the exception of the brief passage just mentioned.

McDowall's *Five Seasons* (2005), commissioned by the Bournemouth Sinfonietta Choir, is a twenty-five minute cantata for mixed chorus, oboe or English horn, harp, and string quartet "to celebrate the organic landscape."<sup>42</sup> The collaboration between Cecilia McDowall and poet Christie Dickason grew out of five research visits to organic farms in the county of Cumbria in the Northwest corner of England. Each of the four framing movements is devoted to one of the four farms visited. The centrally placed movement is devoted to the season of the heart and "The Darkening", the Cumbrian word for dusk. It is paired with the *Dies Irae* text highlighting the darkness which may exist in commercial livestock operations.<sup>43</sup> Again, the use of symmetrical structures, this time with five movements instead of seven, proves to be a hallmark of McDowall's compositional structures. *Five Seasons* is one of the first instances in which McDowall's passion for science and history become a shaping force.

*Christus natus est* (2007), another George Vass commission with the St. Alban's Choral Society of Herefordshire, is a Christmas cantata of five carol arrangements scored for optional soprano solo, optional children's choir, mixed chorus and three accompaniment options. The three options are for chamber orchestra, brass quintet with organ and percussion, and organ only. The five carols featured in this work are *Personet hodie*, *Entre le boeuf*, *Gaudete*, *Infant Holy*, and *Angelus ad virginem*. *Christus natus est* demonstrates McDowall's ability to effectively write within the scope of a given

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<sup>42</sup> McDowall, "Five Seasons," *Cecilia McDowall* (blog), September 17, 2019, <https://ceciliamcdowall.co.uk/2019/09/17/five-seasons-2006/>.

<sup>43</sup> McDowall, "Five Seasons."

commission. McDowall provides a tasteful addition to the wealth of Advent choral literature, but McDowall's unique voice is not abundantly apparent in this composition. Still, her preference for symmetrical construction is apparent in the five-movement format.

*Shipping Forecast* (2012), commissioned by the Portsmouth Festival Choir, is a collaboration between McDowall and poet Seán Street. An interesting note is that Portsmouth University awarded McDowall an honorary doctorate the following year. At fifteen minutes, the three movements titled *Donegal*, *They that go down to the sea*, and *Naming* align with McDowall's consistent preference for symmetrical construction. Street's poetry is punctuated with interpolations of a shipping forecast, designated by italics. *They that go down to the sea* is a setting of the words of Psalm 107, a psalm often spoken over sailors as they leave home. *Naming* features a set of street poetry derived from The Fisheries Broadcast, a related but different broadcast. The shipping forecast is a report broadcast over long wave radio regarding nautical conditions surrounding the British Isles. McDowall states, "It has fascinated people for years. It is like an incantation and it is really quite poetic, and some of it is completely meaningless, like what on earth are you talking about! If you are a sailor, then you know, and it is said in a particular way." *They that go down to the sea* features a pervasive pedal G which Oxford University Press describes as "a kind of harmonic anchor, a note of reassurance".<sup>44</sup> McDowall uses this pedal figure, one of Bramlett's characteristics of English Pastoralism, in the first movement of the *Da Vinci Requiem* as a gesture of reassurance, an image to be discussed

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<sup>44</sup> Oxford University Press, "*Shipping Forecast*," accessed March, 24, 2020, <https://global.oup.com/academic/product/shipping-forecast-9780193379725?cc=us&lang=en&#>.



in detail in chapter four. *Shipping Forecast* is scored for mixed voice choir and strings or piano accompaniment. The work is an example of McDowall's proclivity toward scientific and historical subjects for extra-musical association. The tendency is clear in other works such as *Five Seasons* (2005), *Night Flight* (2014), *Some corner of a foreign field* (2015), *Everyday Wonders: The Girl From Aleppo* (2018), *Da Vinci Requiem* (2019), and the upcoming composition *Pioneers of Sound*.

*Missa Brevis (Tongues of Fire)* (2013), a commission by the London Festival of Contemporary Church Music, is McDowall's only setting of the Mass ordinary. At approximately fifteen minutes in length, the *Missa Brevis* features the standard five mass movements, with an optional movement following the Gloria titled *Linguae Ignis* or Tongues of Fire. At present, no online recordings exist for the work and the score is out of print.

*A Winter's Night* (2014), a commission by the Worthing Choral Society in West Sussex, is a second Christmas cantata of five carol arrangements for mixed choir, brass quintet, organ, and percussion or organ alone and is approximately fifteen minutes in length. For this cantata, McDowall chose to set *In dulci jubilo*, *O Little One Sweet*, *Noel Nouvelet*, *Still, still, still*, and *Sussex Carol*. The work is similar to *Christus Natus Est* in that it highlights McDowall's ability make tasteful additions to the Advent repertoire but is not particularly representative of her unique voice.

While just outside the time constraints of this discussion, *Night Flight* (2014), a commission by the Musique Cordiale Festival for Consort Cordial France, is of particular significance in McDowall's oeuvre as it received the 2014 British Composer Award. McDowall sets Sheila Bryer's poetry concerning the "mysterious powers of the sea,

earth, and air” to mark the centenary of American aviatrix Harriet Quimby’s historic flight across the English Channel. The event was utterly overshadowed by news of the sinking of the RMS Titanic the day before.<sup>45</sup> Scored for mixed choir and solo cello, *Night Flight* exemplifies several of the characteristics which define McDowall’s style, such as the use of phrygian and lydian modes in the third movement titled *Before Dawn*, flexibility between triple and duple division of the beat, rocking figures (e.g. the text “you can be thrown of balance” in movement one, *New Moon*. These features firmly link McDowall to English Pastoralism. A second shared feature between the works is the overlapping of melismatic lines between the first and second soprano parts over more static motion in the lower voices. The device is a distinctive feature of mm. 116-118 of *New Moon* in *Night Flight* and is heard repeatedly throughout the *Sanctus and Benedictus* movement of the *Da Vinci Requiem*. *Night Flight* also includes pervasive rhythmic permutation, a hallmark of her style mentioned earlier in chapter two, and a more dissonant harmonic language. *Night Flight* is more challenging than most of the composer’s commissions for choral societies, with the exception of the *Da Vinci Requiem*.

*Some corner of a foreign field* (2015) is a cantata for tenor solo, mixed chorus, harp, and strings commissioned by Dulwich College. At eighteen-minutes, the work features texts by Dulwich College Headmaster Dr. Joseph Spence, WWI poet Rupert Brooke, and words from the book of Job. McDowall provides the following program note:

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<sup>45</sup> McDowall, “Night Flight (2014),” *Cecilia McDowall* (blog), September 17, 2019, <https://ceciliamcdowall.co.uk/2019/09/17/night-flight-2014/>.

*Some corner of a foreign field* was commissioned to mark the centenary of the First World War. A profoundly moving cantata, it draws on biblical texts associated with the acclaimed pupil of Dulwich College, Sir Ernest Shackleton, his 1916 Antarctic Expedition, and Rupert Brooke, the centenary of whose death falls on 2015. This beautiful work, with its lustrous harmonies and its poignant tenor solo, offers choirs an immensely rewarding experience.<sup>46</sup>

McDowall's self-acknowledged preference for finding compositional inspiration in historical and scientific subjects is once again in evidence here.

*A Time for all Seasons* (2016), a commission by Edward-Rhys Harry and the Harlow Chorus of East Anglia, is a cantata for mixed voices and youth choir scored for soprano solo, upper voices, SSATB chorus, piano, and optional percussion. It is interesting to note that Harry is a former student of Neil Ferris, the artistic director of the WCS. Oxford University Press provides the following description of the work:

*A Time for all Seasons* is an evocative cantata that explores the complexities of the human condition. The well-known 'to everything there is a season' text from Ecclesiastes is interwoven with a modern-day reworking of the verses by award-winning poet Kevin Crossley-Holland. McDowall's impressive range of musical styles, effective antiphonal writing, and artful juxtaposition of textures work together to create a meaningful experience for the listener.<sup>47</sup>

*Everyday Wonders: The Girl from Aleppo* (2018) was commissioned and premiered by the National Children's Choir of Great Britain on its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary. A collaboration between McDowall and poet Kevin Crossley-Holland, *Everyday Wonders* is scored for upper voices, mixed chorus, optional solos from the choir, violin solo, and piano and is approximately eighteen minutes in length. In our interview, McDowall brought attention to this piece as another example of her fascination with the tension of

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<sup>46</sup> Oxford University Press, "*Some Corner of a Foreign Field*," accessed March 24, 2020, <https://global.oup.com/academic/product/some-corner-of-a-foreign-field-9780193404540?cc=us&lang=en&#>.

<sup>47</sup> Oxford University Press, "*A Time for All Season*," accessed March 24, 2020, <https://global.oup.com/academic/product/a-time-for-all-seasons-9780193411487?cc=us&lang=en&#>.

the lowered second of the phrygian mode, a prominent harmonic language in Middle Eastern music. In this particular case, the allusion to phrygian mode directly corresponds to the cultural context of Nujeen Mustafa's life. However, the use of this mode is not a new concept within McDowall's style or within the context of English Pastoralism. In addition, the subject matter of the work reaffirms McDowall's passion for history, in this case a contemporary event, as an inspirational catalyst. The composer's website provides the following description of the work:

*Everyday Wonders: The Girl from Aleppo* tells the extraordinary story of Nujeen Mustafa, a Kurdish teenager with cerebral palsy forced by war to flee her home and embark on an arduous journey to Europe with her sister. In this five-movement cantata Nujeen's story – recounted in her biography 'The Girl from Aleppo' (co-authored by Christina Lamb) – is retold by Kevin Crossley-Holland and richly scored by Cecilia McDowall. A wealth of musical effects are employed to capture the narrative, including chorales, rhythmic spoken sections, body percussion, and a solo violin part infused with Middle Eastern flavours. The prevailing mood of Nujeen's story is embodied by the final line of a chorale that bookends this unique concert work: 'singing the song of life itself.'<sup>48</sup>

Turning to the focus of this document, the *Da Vinci Requiem* began with the 100th anniversary of the Wimbledon Choral Society in 2015. For the anniversary, the board of directors and Music Director, Neil Ferris, decided to commission a large choral-orchestral work to be premiered several years later. In the end, the number of possible composers was reduced to three, including Jonathan Dove, Janet Wheeler, and Cecilia McDowall. Jonathan Dove (b. 1959) is an English composer specializing in opera and the voice and has written many choral works. In 2019, he was made a Commander of the British Empire by Queen Elizabeth II for his contributions to music at the Queen's

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<sup>48</sup> McDowall, "Everyday Wonders: The Girl from Aleppo (2018) - Cecilia McDowall," accessed February 12, 2020, <https://ceciliamcdowall.co.uk/2019/09/17/everyday-wonders-the-girl-from-aleppo-2018/>.

Birthday Honours.<sup>49</sup> Janet Wheeler (b. 1957) is an English composer and conductor specializing in choral music.

Cecilia McDowall's proposal of a Requiem, one that would not contain all elements of the traditional requiem mass, received the commission. Ferris also wanted to have non-religious texts in English paired with the chosen Latin texts. After this decision, the head of marketing for the WCS did research into what anniversaries might coincide with the premiere of the work in May 2019 and suggested highlighting the 500th year anniversary of the death of Leonardo da Vinci to Mrs. McDowall. Upon this suggestion, she remembered that she had grown up with an English translation of the notebooks of da Vinci in her home. In a blog post about the conception of the work, Mrs. McDowall says:

Before starting work on the Requiem, I remembered that we had *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci* somewhere in the family home. In 1946, my mother gave my father the two volumes of these then recently translated 'Notebooks' as a wedding present. She knew my father had an enduring fascination for Leonardo and Leonardo's scientific view of the world. (My father had a place to read Natural Sciences at university but changed his mind to become a flautist. After my parents married, he was given the post of principal flute at the Royal Opera House.) As a child I loved poring over these large dusty tomes of Leonardo's, filled with the most extraordinary sketches.

So, looking for connections between Leonardo's philosophical writings and the *Missa pro Defunctis* became a curiously enriching line of enquiry. Leonardo's position on religion and faith has always been ambiguous; many have tried to impose their views on his personal beliefs but who can say what currency these have? Giorgio Vasari, the sixteenth-century art historian (amongst other things), at one time had this to say about Leonardo's approach to religion: Leonardo formed in his mind a conception so heretical as not to approach any religion whatsoever . . . 'perhaps he esteemed being a philosopher much more than being a Christian.' However, Vasari omitted this rather provocative statement in a second edition of his *Lives of the Painters*. Ultimately, it's the essence of what Leonardo

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<sup>49</sup> Jonathan Dove, "Biography," Jonathan Dove, accessed February 10, 2020, <https://www.jonathandove.com/biography.html>.

says, how his ideas on life and death marry so well with the Requiem Mass, which intrigues.<sup>50</sup>

The work born out of this commission and intrigue is the *Da Vinci Requiem* subtitled *La Prospettiva de' perdimenti* (The Perspective of Disappearance) for Soprano and Bass soloists, Mixed Chorus, and Orchestra. The premiere featured Kate Royal and Rodderick Williams as the soprano and bass soloists, the Wimbledon Choral Society (with a chorus of 160), and the Philharmonia Orchestra. The seven movements of the work are as follows: 1) *Introit and Kyrie*, 2) *The Virgin of the Rocks*, 3) *I obey thee, O Lord (Lacrimosa)*, 4) *Sanctus and Benedictus*, 5) *Agnus Dei*, 6) *O you who are asleep*, and 7) *Lux Aeterna*. The work is scored for late-classical sized orchestra with colorful instrumental doublings and an extended percussion section for two players. The orchestra consists of 2 flutes (second doubling piccolo), 2 oboes (second doubling English horn), 2 clarinets (second doubling bass clarinet), 2 bassoons (second doubling contrabassoon), 2 horns in F, 2 trumpets in B-flat, timpani, and percussion (glockenspiel, suspended cymbal, side drum, tambourine, and vibraphone - 2 players), harp, and strings.

As aforementioned, Nicholas Dakin collaborated with McDowall in the search for suitable texts written by Leonardo da Vinci that would pair well with the Requiem Mass texts. In an email about his role in the development of the work, Dakin expressed that “it seemed that the Requiem and the Notebooks exerted a certain 'magnetic' attraction...life and death, light and flight, souls and flying machines...” The macaronic combination of texts sources and languages was a point of importance and intentionality. Dakin originally suggested that the language pairs be Latin and Italian. However, McDowall and Ferris were intent on combining Latin and English for more immediate accessibility

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<sup>50</sup> McDowall, “Exploring the Da Vinci Requiem,” OUPblog, May 1, 2019, <https://blog.oup.com/2019/05/exploring-da-vinci-requiem/>.

and effect for the intended audience. A second conscious decision was the use of the 1948 edition of the notebooks compiled by Jonathan Cape in London. It is this edition of the notebooks that resided in the Clarke family home. Dakin extracted 13 excerpts for various sections of the notebooks of which nine were used in the work. The only excerpt that was changed from the English provided by Dakin was the quote, “When you walk on the ground after flying, you will look up to the sky because you have been there and you want to go back.” The quote was rendered more poetically in the final version which reads, “once you have tasted flight, you will forever walk the earth with your eyes turned skyward. For there you have been, and there you will always long to return.” In personal email correspondence with me, Dakin also noted that the shortening of the requiem liturgy was primarily a decision concerning work length and time. However, McDowall notes in our interview that she was not sure how best to set the *Dies Irae* text amid the current world culture in which organized religion is less central for much of the globe than in previous times, and the idea of a judgement day is less widely embraced. The *Libera Me* and *In Paradisum* sections which are normally used at the burial itself were also excluded from the work.

The *Da Vinci Requiem* requires a large choral ensemble; the premiere employed a choir of 160 voices. However, this size makes it difficult to communicate the nuances such as the subtle differences in rhythm in repeated phrases within the work. A choir that large also has trouble achieving the subtle motivic nuances of the first, third, and seventh movements. In addition, a choir of 160 and a Beethovenian-sized orchestra tends to overbalance the lyric voices needed for the soprano and bass solos. An ideal chorus size for the work would be in the range of 50 to 70 voices. A choir this large would

appropriately balance the orchestra and soloists while providing the contrast in color and character necessary in the alternation of full chorus and semi-chorus in the seventh movement. McDowall also has plans for a chamber orchestra version of the work for single wind, harp reduction, and strings. However, McDowall notes that a performance of the work with piano alone would also be complete in her mind; she crafted the piano reduction in the vocal score to function as an acceptable performance accompaniment. If a conductor chooses to perform the work with piano accompaniment, it would be advisable to reduce the choral forces to a range of 30 to 40 voices for optimum balance while still allowing enough contrast between full chorus and semi-chorus.

The *Da Vinci Requiem* represents a culmination of the characteristics which abound within her large choral works. The compositional techniques explored in this chapter, including the influence of English Pastoralism, a preference for symmetrical structures with five or seven movements, and an inspiration by historic or scientific subjects, are apparent within McDowall's oeuvre and the *Da Vinci Requiem*, as the pinnacle work of her compositional journey. McDowall's compositional style has continued to mature and reflect more individualistic and unfettered artistic expression as she has gained notoriety in the international choral community. Consequently, McDowall's future compositions will likely continue the trend of growth and development evident within her large choral works and particularly the *Da Vinci Requiem*.



## CHAPTER 4

### A GUIDE TO STRUCTURE AND PERFORMANCE

The following discussion will help prospective conductors make informed decision in regards to programming and performing the *Da Vinci Requiem* by exploring overall structure, unifying motivic connections, imagery, texts, and inherent performance challenges from the perspective of the conductor. A deeper understanding of the *Da Vinci Requiem* will also serve as a lens through which to view McDowall's oeuvre.

#### Overall Structure

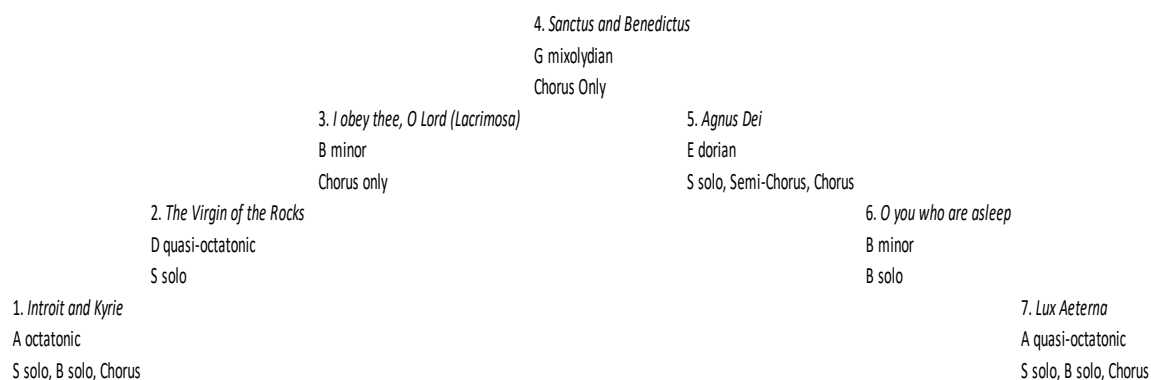


Figure 4.1. *Da Vinci Requiem* Form Chart

The seven movements of the work are constructed using a palindromic arch form with movement four, *Sanctus and Benedictus*, serving as the apogee (Figure 4.1.). McDowall also envisions the work as a progression from darkness to light. The following discussion will compare the paired movements beginning with the outer movements and work toward the central movement. The first and last movements feature choir, soprano

solo and bass solo. In both movements, she uses the octatonic scale centered on A (Figure 4.2).

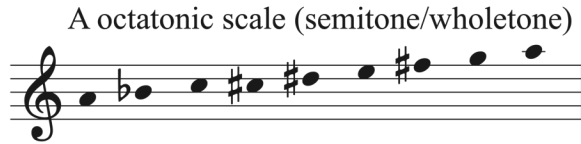


Figure 4.2. The A octatonic scale

Two distinctive features of the octatonic scale, one beginning with a half step, are the flattened second and raised fourth scale degree when compared to a diatonic scale built from the pitch A. The presence of these tendency tones is common thread in much of McDowall's music. From this perspective, it is tempting to view McDowall's construction of the octatonic scale as a conflation of phrygian and lydian modes, however, she identified that she used the octatonic scale or variants of it in our interview. The first movement is the only movement which features the octatonic scale without alterations, although characteristic flattened second or raised fourth of the octatonic scale is alluded to in movements two, five, six, and seven. The last movement features modified version of the A octatonic scale. In movement seven, McDowall lowers F#, which would have been the sixth scale degree in A major, to F-natural, providing a stronger pull to the fifth of the key (Figure 4.3), thereby helps to anchoring the movement to A as the tonal center.

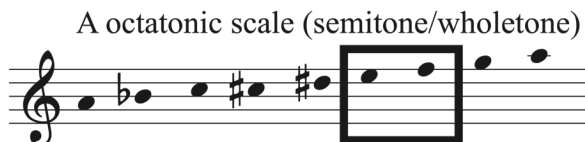


Figure 4.3. The A octatonic scale with F# lowered to F-natural.

Movements two and six are both solo movements, neither of which incorporate Latin text. Movement two, *The Virgin of the Rocks*, centers on the D quasi-octatonic scale. Again here, B-natural is modified to Bb to emphasize the dominant, A, and anchor the pitch center. Movement six, *O you who are asleep*, is centered on B octatonic with the same modification (G# to G-natural) while the fourth scale degree is avoided entirely. The movement also features extensive interplay between G minor and D octatonic, again with the modified “sixth scale degree.”

Movement three, *I obey thee, O Lord (Lacrimosa)*, begins in E minor, but sits firmly in the key of B minor for most of the movement with brief passages in F# minor and C# minor. Movement three, like movement four, employs the choir only; *I obey thee, O Lord (Lacrimosa)* is also designed for stand-alone performance and was intended for excerption from its conception.<sup>51</sup> Its counterpart, movement five, *Agnus Dei*, is scored for chorus and soprano solo and uses the E dorian scale as its basis for harmonic and melodic construction. The harmony drifts to A major throughout the movement, but the octatonic scale is alluded to through a lowered second scale degree present in these passages. The movement is also unique in that it is the only one that incorporates a chant melody. The *Agnus Dei* incipit is sung by a single male singer from within the choir and is followed in unison by the tenor and bass sections. The chant melody also serves as the basis for the *Agnus Dei* phrase that repeats throughout the movement.

As the apogee, movement four, the *Sanctus and Benedictus*, stands in stark contrast with the rest of the work. The tempo marking is “rhythmic, with energy” in 6/8 time with dotted-quarter note = 88 bpm, which is faster than the contemplative tempos

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<sup>51</sup> McDowall, Interview.

featured in every other movement of the work. The piece is also set in the brightness of G mixolydian. The rhythmic content of the movement features heavy use of hemiola and the juxtaposition of 2 against 3. The only other movement which features a tempo indication above 50 bpm is the final movement, which features the indication “bright, luminous” in 4/4 time, with quarter note = 80 bpm. However, the rhythms in the final movement are expansive, which negates the feeling of the faster underlying pulse.

### Unifying Motivic Connections

McDowall also provides structural unity through motivic connections between the movements. In our interview, McDowall mentioned that these connections have no textual connotations but are simply unifying compositional devices.<sup>52</sup> The introduction of the first movement features arpeggiation of the octatonic collection over and an A pedal, followed by a rising line through the octatonic scale (Figure 4.4), which is harmonized with frequent tritones.



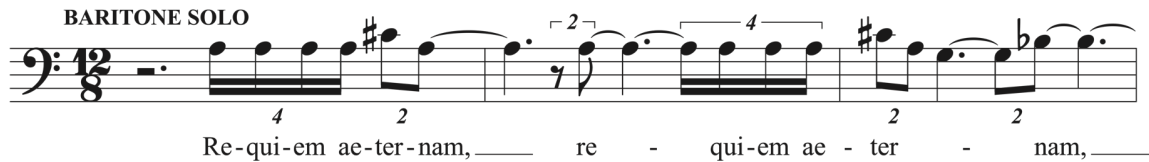
Figure 4.4. Rising line harmonized with tritones, *Introit and Kyrie* mm. 3–5.

The use of tritones in the work is extensive, which is not surprising considering all the tritones which exist within the scale. There are three distinct phrases in movement one which echo in fragments within movements two, three, six, and seven. The first is the

<sup>52</sup> McDowall, Interview.

opening baritone line on *requiem aeternam* (Figure 4.5) which echoes in horn lines of movement two.

Original Version, *Introit and Kyrie* mm. 17–19.



Echo from horn line, *The Virgin of the Rocks* mm. 5.

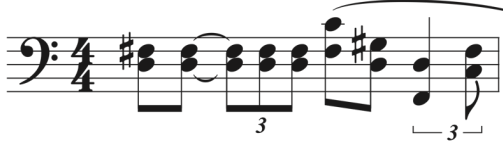


Figure 4.5. *Requiem Aeternam* motive, *Introit and Kyrie*, mm. 17–18; *The Virgin of the Rocks*, mm. 5.

The second motive is the soprano line in mm. 15–16 on the text “O Leonardo” (Figure 4.6), which is reflected in the soprano solo in the *Agnus Dei*, and the soprano line of the choral parts in m. 13–15 of movement seven is an ornamented and rhythmically augmented reflection of the motive. The third is the *Kyrie* motive of movement one in mm. 53–54 which is seen again in augmented form in mm. 164–25 of movement seven (Figure 4.7.)

Original Version, *Introit and Kyrie* mm. 15–16.



Ornamented and Augmented Version, *Lux Aeterna* mm. 13–15.

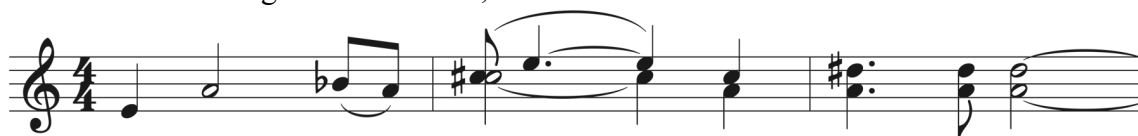


Figure 4.6. O Leonardo motive, *Introit and Kyrie* mm. 15–16; *Lux Aeterna* mm. 13–15.

Original Version, *Introit and Kyrie* mm. 53–54.



Augmented Version, *Lux Aeterna* mm. 164–19.



Figure 4.7. Kyrie motive, *Introit and Kyrie* mm. 53–54; *Lux Aeterna* mm. 164–19.

The choral parts derived from the “O Leonardo” and *Kyrie* motives repeat underneath the solo parts throughout the remainder of the final movement. The two motivic connections, then, constitute much of the motivic content developed in the final

movement. Finally, the choir ends the work by singing the A octatonic scale with an altered sixth scale degree with optional *glissandi* between the notes. Two solo violins then repeat this scale into the extremes of their range, gradually folding into silence with, again, a tritone as the final interval.

### Imagery

Imagery is also a major unifying factor within the *Da Vinci Requiem*. The *Introit and Kyrie* is dominated by an undulating motive in the choral parts, with each voice oscillating between two pitches for much of the movement. The choir is supported by the arpeggiated octatonic collection in the accompaniment. Rhythmically, the first movement abounds in two against three polyrhythms which further enhance the unsettled rocking. The movement is also rather static with an A pedal lasting for thirty measures before moving to a new pitch center of F# minor. It then quickly modulates briefly to C# dorian and back to A by mm. 46. The undulating, rocking textures over the extended pedal reflect the composer's image of turning rosary beads.

In movement two, the composer was specifically inspired by the London version of Leonardo da Vinci's *Virgin of the Rocks* painting mused upon in Dante Gabriel Rossetti's poem. The painting is currently housed in the National Gallery in London. The London version of the painting is quite clear and does not feature Da Vinci's *sfumato* technique. It depicts the Virgin, the Christ child, and John the Baptist, and the angel Uriel standing at the mouth of a rocky cave with a bright blue sea in the background. By contrast, the Paris version of the painting makes extensive use of the *sfumato* technique and is hazy and with less contrast in color. The music reflects the sharpness of the rocks in the painting with stark dissonances, constantly shifting meter, angular melodic lines.

Descending *glissandi* at the ends of the vocal phrases and in the low strings focus the mood on the darker implications of the painting and text. In our discussion of *The Virgin of the Rocks*, McDowall states, “For me, it was about color and a ‘pulling’, underlining ‘gravity’, in every sense. This second movement plunges downwards so that on arriving at the *Lacrimosa* in the next movement there should be an upward surge. That’s my hope! Like a burial, we bury those we love deep in the earth but then the spirit rises ... just my thinking behind the relationship between these two movements.”<sup>53</sup>

McDowall describes movement three as “melodic”, and consciously takes “an opportunity for expressivity after the dark edginess of the second movement, *The Virgin of the Rocks*.”<sup>54</sup> As mentioned previously, the piece was intended to serve as a stand-alone excerpt from the work from its conception, so its character is less dark than the rest of the work. With less dissonance and solemnity than the previous movement, movement five pushed towards the consonance and brightness of the *Sanctus and Benedictus*, which has no specific image. McDowall notes in our interview that she felt it was a chance to bring a sense of joy and contrast into the work.

The *Agnus Dei* features low-set, thick chords in the choral parts reminiscent of Russian orthodox choral textures. The composer specifically drew the connection between the choral textures of this movement and those of the Russian orthodox tradition in our conversation in May. The work also features a Monteverdian treatment of the texts “one sees” (Figure 4.8) with repeated syllabification of the vowel of “se-e-e-es” to highlight the word.<sup>55</sup> Monteverdi employs similar rhetorical devices in his madrigals. She

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<sup>53</sup> McDowall, Interview.

<sup>54</sup> McDowall, Interview.

<sup>55</sup> McDowall, Interview.



highlights this word to draw attention to da Vinci's fascination with perception and vision, and his development of painting techniques such as *sfumato* to convey a realistic visual perspective.

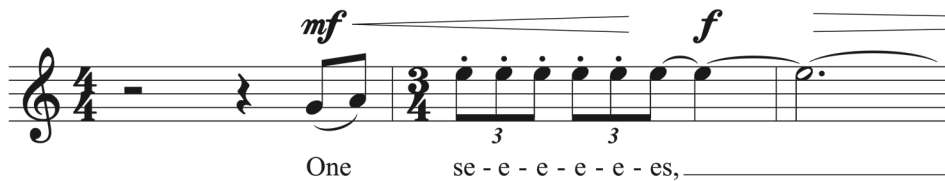


Figure 4.8. *Agnus Dei* mm. 33–34.

*O you who are asleep* establishes a dream-like atmosphere through rocking 6/8 rhythms, the quasi-octatonic harmonic language, and instrumentation. The use of the octatonic scale to portray dream-like states or fantasy is not unlike Stravinsky's use of the octatonic collection in ballets such as *Firebird* and *Petrushka*. It is not surprising that McDowall would be influenced by this convention given that Stravinsky is cited as a major influence in the line of composers which she admires.<sup>56</sup>

*The Perspective of Disappearance* is a subsection of da Vinci's "Notebooks" devoted to the concept of how objects gradually blur and disappear when viewed from a distance with the naked eye. The phrase is also the subtitle for the *Da Vinci Requiem*. In movement seven, McDowall highlights the sparkling brightness of *lux aeterna* (eternal light) through dissonant harmonic clusters. However, the most striking image of the last movement is the choral ascent on the modified octatonic scale with *glissandos* between the notes. The aural blurring created by the *glissandos* is a musical rendering of da Vinci's *sfumato* technique of blurring the edges of a painting to give it a more realistic

<sup>56</sup> McDowall, Interview.

perspective to the observer. The passage also gradually folds up into silence. If it resolves, it does so beyond the perspective of the listener. mirroring the way objects at a distance lose focus and eventually disappear.

## Texts

The *Da Vinci Requiem* does not employ the entirety of the collection of texts which constitute the Requiem Mass. With the assistance of Nicholas Dakin, McDowall chose to set the following texts from the *Missa pro defunctis*: the *Introit and Kyrie*, *Lacrimosa* which is taken from the end of the *Sequence*, the *Sanctus and Benedictus*, the *Agnus Dei*, and the *Lux Aeterna*. Many of the other traditional requiem texts are omitted including the *Gradual*, *Tract*, most of the *Sequence*, the *Offertory*, the *Pie Jesu*, the *Libera me*, and the *In Paradisum*. The corresponding da Vinci texts used along with the *Introit and Kyrie* are as follows: “O Leonardo, why do you toil so much?”, “Because movement will cease before we are weary of being useful,” “Shadow is not the absence of light: merely the obstruction of luminous rays by an opaque body,” and “We are all exiled living within the frame of a strange picture.” The second movement for solo soprano sets a poem written by Dante Gabriel Rossetti entitled *For Our Lady of the Rocks*. The third movement, *Lacrimosa*, is paired with “I obey Thee, O Lord, first because of the love which I ought to bear thee: secondly, because thou knowest how to shorten or prolong the lives of men.” and “Tears come from the heart, not from the brain. Our body is subject to heaven, and heaven is subject to the spirit.” The fourth movement, *Sanctus and Benedictus*, is the only movement that features the Latin text alone. The fifth movement, the *Agnus Dei*, pairs the Latin text with a passage taken from the bestiary section of the da Vinci notebooks in which da Vinci states, “one sees the supreme

instance of the humility of the lamb.” The sixth movement, *O you who are asleep*, is the only movement that incorporates da Vinci texts exclusively. The quote is essentially a comparison of death after a well-spent life with sleep after a good day’s work. The seventh movement, *Lux Aeterna*, features the following da Vinci quotes: “Once you have tasted flight, you will forever walk the earth with your eyes skyward, for there you have been, and there you will always long to return. O Leonardo.” The complete texts and translations may be found in Appendix C. |

### Conducting Challenges

Each movement of the *Da Vinci Requiem* presents unique challenges to the conductor as artist and teacher. The challenges for the conductor include setting the appropriate tempo, shaping musical lines, shading dynamic contrasts, and adjusting for balance between choir and orchestra. However, the challenges are not limited to interpretive decisions and conducting mechanics but also include developing strategies to quickly and effectively teach the repertoire to the choristers. To that end, the subsequent information will prove useful in the preparation and performance of the work.

The harmonic language of movement one is the most significant challenges. The octatonic scale is not commonly employed in choral music, and it is unlikely that most choristers will have extensive experience singing it. McDowall does alleviate some of the challenge for the choir through her voice leading, which employs mostly step-wise motion. The first movement is also grounded in A, giving choristers an anchor from which to read the many accidentals which exist in the score. It would be beneficial to build the octatonic scale into the daily warm-up portion of rehearsals while preparing the work so that the choir may acclimate to the octatonic soundscape. The singing of more

frequent half-steps in the warm-up process would also be beneficial given the increased number of half-steps in the octatonic scale when compared to the major scale. A visual of the scale would also be a useful teaching tool.

The solos of the first movement are not given the same step-wise voice leading, but feature frequent skips and leaps. Pitch entrances for the solos are often outliers of the chords sounding in the measure. So, it is paramount that the chosen soloists for the work have strong aural skills. The solos also demand lyricism throughout the entirety of the range and feature frequent leaps to and decrescendos on notes in the upper register. Balance between soloists, orchestra, and chorus was also a challenge in the premiere of the work, especially when the soloists enter in the lower part of their range, which happens frequently. A performance by a smaller chorus, perhaps 50-70 voices, would likely negate these issues.

It is also imperative that the pervasive rocking motives retain their shape and character throughout. The motive can become monotonous if attention is not given to shaping each repetition. The constant two against three polyrhythms of the first movement is also a teaching and performance challenge as these rhythms tend to lose their integrity when frequently repeated. Further, it is essential that the polyrhythm remain accurate; this is a significant factor in maintain the forward momentum of the piece. The selection of an ideal tempo is also a major conducting decision for the first movement. The given metronome marking is dotted-quarter note = 46 bpm. It comes down to selecting a tempo that works for your ensemble because of the momentum needed to sufficiently shape the rocking lines.

The most significant challenge of movement two is the difficulty of the angular quasi-octatonic melody for the soprano soloist and the rhythmic complexity for both orchestra and soloist. The angularity and rhythmic complexity of the solo line is clearly demonstrated in mm. 12–13 (Figure 4.9), which are representative the soprano solo throughout the movement.



Figure 4.9. *The Virgin of the Rocks* mm. 12–13.

The piano reduction in mm. 27–29, illuminates the use of multiple complex rhythms including quintuplets, sextuplets, eighth triplets, and quarter triplets, within the span of three measures. Similar complex rhythms exist throughout the movement for both the accompaniment and the solo. A discrepancy between the orchestral score and the piano reduction occurs in mm. 15–16 in the bass notes. The orchestral score employs an E in the bass while the piano score employs a G#. The bass pitch of the piano could be changed to E in this instance, thereby providing a better anchor to the shifting tonal center and maintaining consistency between rehearsal with piano and performance with orchestra. An additional performance consideration is drawing awareness to the horn lines in mm. 5, 30, and 44–45. This motive reflects the opening of the baritone solo in movement one, mentioned and shown earlier (Figure 4.4). While not an exact repetition, the motive recalls the “*requiem aeternam*” motive from the first movement and contributes to the continuity of the work. In our interview, McDowall mentions that these motives are compositional devices rather than textual devices, however, the listener and

performer will likely associate this motive with the “*requiem aeternam*” text meaning “grant them eternal rest.”<sup>57</sup>

The greatest conducting challenge of movement three is the shaping of the legato lines in a constantly shifting metric context. A shift between 5/4 and 3/4 time is common throughout the movement, but this does not constitute a regular or predictable pattern. A second consideration is highlighting the contrast which exists between the characters of the SA and TB duets. The SA duet sounds with an unyielding lamenting legato while the TB duet is a more angst filled declamatory statement with dotted rhythms. McDowall also beautifully paints the text “how to shorten or prolong the lives of men” in mm. 27–29. The phrase features rhythmic values that shorten and lengthen with the corresponding text (Figure 4.10).



Figure 4.10. *I obey thee, O Lord (Lacrimosa)* mm.27–29.

In the beginning of the movement, the Latin text is in the SA parts, and the da Vinci quotes are sung by the tenors and basses; however, these roles are shifted upon the return of the A material. The shift has interesting textual implications. From the beginning, the tenors and basses seem to voice da Vinci’s prayer for himself. The sopranos and altos sing “Therefore spare him, O God” in Latin. However, the return of the A section could reflect angels confirming da Vinci’s notion that “the body is subject to heaven and heaven is subject to the spirit.” Whether this is McDowall’s intention or

<sup>57</sup> McDowall, Interview.

not, the change in texture and text placement adds an interesting level of complexity to the narrative.

Movement four, *Sanctus and Benedictus*, is the most harmonically direct as it sounds in G mixolydian with the *Benedictus* section in the key of C minor. The movement presents the conductor with an excellent opportunity to introduce the choir to the work in a way which produces early success, given the harmonic complexity of most of the other movements. The greatest challenge in movement four is the abundant use of hemiola and entrances just ahead of the downbeat. A second rhythmic challenge is the variety which exists in repeats; McDowall deliberately avoids the “copy and paste” method.<sup>58</sup> One troublesome variance is the change from triple to duple division of the beat in the ATB parts between mm. 36–49 and mm. 87–99. The tempo adjustment from dotted-quarter note = 88 bpm in the *Sanctus* section of the movement to quarter note = 56 bpm in the *Benedictus* section is challenging to negotiate. The sustained lines of m. 128 provide an opportunity for the conductor to allow the energy of the previous section to dissipate and clearly indicate the tempo for the *Benedictus* section. The tempo of the *Benedictus* section in the premiere and in the author’s performance of the work was significantly faster. The tempo of the premiere and the author’s performance gravitated to 66 bpm rather than 56 bpm as written.

The first significant performance consideration in movement five concerns the starting pitch for the solo incipit. In both the premiere and the author’s performance, the soloist found the pitch from the end of the previous movement; the fourth movement ends in G and the soloist’s first pitch is G. The most significant challenge in movement five is

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<sup>58</sup> McDowall, Interview.

the constant rhythmic variation of the repeated *Agnus Dei* phrase. No two repetitions of the phrase are rhythmically identical and many of the variations are quite syncopated. The conductor's ictus must facilitate rhythmic accuracy while also maintaining the unyielding legato character of the choral parts. Harmonically, the constant shift between the pitch centers of E dorian and A quasi-octatonic presents a challenge for the singers. The challenge may be lessened by identifying that the upper five pitches of the E dorian scale (fa, sol, la, te, do) are also the notes of the A major five-note scale. Consequently, the entire movement may be sung on solfege with E as "do". The consistency of the solfege syllables will simplify and expedite the learning process for less experienced singers. A visual of this harmonic relationship may also be helpful.

The sixth movement for baritone solo employs a quasi-octatonic scale which is challenging to sing accurately. However, the melodic character of the baritone solo is fairly conjunct within the octatonic context. The most significant challenge of the movement is the tessitura for the baritone, which often sits above the staff while calling for a *leggiero* character. One example is the passage "it is sleep" in mm. 89–91 which requires the soloist to negotiate D and F above the staff with lightness in tone and articulation (Figure 4.11).

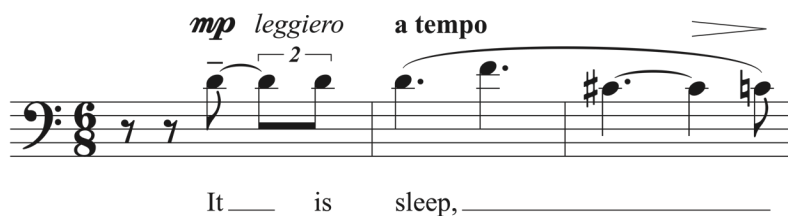


Figure 4.11. *O you who are asleep* mm. 89–91.

One other interesting feature of the movement is that while it oscillates harmonically between B octatonic and G minor and clearly cadences in B in mm. 120, it



ends in D mixolydian. The ending in D provides an aural relationship to its counterpart movement two, which is largely in D. Furthermore, the final harmony of the piece is a D dominant seventh chord. Perhaps, this is to provide a sense of perpetuity to the movement. This is not a new device within the requiem genre or within this work. In fact, all movements except for the *Sanctus and Benedictus* end with a dissonant final harmony, including the last sounds of the work. One well-known requiem which ends on a dominant seventh chord built on the tonic pitch is Duruflé's *Requiem*, though Duruflé adds a ninth to the F# dominant seventh chord. The unresolved harmony seems to continue into eternity, which matches well with the textual content concerning a happy end to a life well lived.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the thematic content for movement seven is largely drawn from motives which appear in movement one, though here featured in augmentation. The melodic content of the final movement is relatively easy to grasp. However, tempo and tuning prove to be major challenges. The tempo of *Lux Aeterna* is marked quarter-note = 80 bpm; however, the tempo of the premiere and the author's performance fell in the 75-77 bpm range. Tuning is also an issue given that most of the movement features 6 or 8-part divisi with thick chords built around an octatonic motive. It is helpful to recognize that the chords are identical in quality to those in the *Introit and Kyrie*, with rhythmic augmentation being the largest difference. The greatest challenge of the work is the negotiation of the *glissandi* of the choral parts rising through the modified octatonic scale in mm. 65-86. The key to an organic performance of these lines is to linger long enough on each written pitch while sliding slow enough between pitches to give the aural *sfumato* affect. It is also key that a *glissando* not exist between D# and E in

the ascent, which is indicated in the score. One strategy for teaching this is to use a choral warm-up in which the choir slowly changes pitches between whole tones and semitones over the course of several beats. This helps singers adjust to the mechanics of this extended technique before attempting to apply it in practice.

### Summary

In conclusion, the exploration of Cecilia McDowall's life and compositional style as evidenced in the *Da Vinci Requiem* has led to several key discoveries. McDowall exhibits a fondness for the modal sonorities of English Pastoralism in her choice of harmonic language. Evidence for this discovery is clearly found within the *Da Vinci Requiem* but also in other works throughout her career. She also frequently turns to science and history as extra-musical sources of inspiration. The examination of McDowall's oeuvre also demonstrates her preference for symmetrical three, five, and seven-movement structures, which feature one movement as the centerpiece of the work. The "superb voice leading and willingness to go to dark and profound places" is clearly displayed through the *Da Vinci Requiem* and other works.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, the *Da Vinci Requiem* represents a pinnacle of large-scale choral compositions in McDowall's current output. Given that she has only been composing full time since 2008, McDowall's most significant choral works may yet be ahead of her. It is the author's hope that this study will help Cecilia McDowall continue to gain the notoriety she deserves as one of the most important living British composers. Possible future areas of study include comparison study of the *Da Vinci Requiem* and *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci* by Jocelyn Hagen would shed light on two very different perspectives concerning the same subject

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<sup>59</sup> Ferris, Interview.

and premiered in the same year and paired together in the upcoming performance in Sweden by the Gustaf Vasa Kammarkör. A second possible study is a more comprehensive examination of McDowall's compositional style as evidenced across the entire body of her work, including the many motets and part-songs which were not discussed. A comparison study of the *Da Vinci Requiem* and the *Stabat Mater* would also help further illuminate her compositional style, particularly in large-scale works.

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## APPENDIX A

### INTERVIEW WITH CECILIA MCDOWALL

It was my honor to interview Cecilia McDowall in her home in London, UK, on the morning of May 9th, 2019. She welcomed me into her home with tea and biscuits and sat with me thoroughly answering my questions in her sitting room looking out into her beautiful English garden. JT denotes the author, Jantsen Touchstone, and CM denotes Cecilia McDowall. The interview has been edited for grammar but not content.

JT: Thank you so much for welcoming me into your lovely home today, and congratulations on a successful premier of the *Da Vinci Requiem*.

CM: I am delighted you were there. Thank you very much for coming all this way.

JT: Thank you. If you do not mind, we will begin with biographical questions, specifically related to you as a musician. My first question is, at what point did you begin composing?

CM: I suppose if one thinks of improvisation as the beginnings of composition then I began quite young. I started learning the piano at seven but often felt improvising (or, as my mother described it, messing about at the keyboard) was much more fun. It was many years later, when I was about forty-nine, that I began composing seriously. Before then there had been much to take my attention . . . university, music college followed by

teaching music in secondary schools, private and state, then at Trinity College of Music and later at the specialist school, the Yehudi Menuhin School (for musically gifted children). So between teaching and having a young family it took me a while to work out how to balance things well enough so I could pursue what I loved, composing. Once my children reached teenage independence I thought it would be wise to take a Master's degree and try to find my way back to composing. Starting late did make me think that it could all have been so much easier if I'd decided to become a composer when I was a student. That way I would have had contact with my peers, all performers, in the music world. But, ultimately, I don't regard my late start as being a setback. Many composers leave university or music college with friends who can then go out and perform one's music ... but by the time I began composing again I'd lost touch with many I had studied with. Getting started at a late stage was a bit tougher but I was introduced to the wonderful chamber ensemble, the Fibonacci Sequence, who invited me to be composer-in-residence which enabled me to write music for any or each of the instruments of that ensemble. It was a great start to finding my 'voice'. My compositional beginnings were more instrumental than vocal then. Another valuable association at this time was with the soprano and founder of Concordia Foundation, Gillian Humphreys. She was a great support, commissioning and encouraging me in every way.

JT: When you were with your children and teaching, did you write as a hobby? Were you writing then and just not publishing?

CM: I wrote anything I was specifically asked for then. My father was a professional flautist and taught as well...all abilities, mostly students wanting to become soloists...and



he coached orchestral players, too. I remember him saying he felt there wasn't enough "tuneful" flute music for young players. He put me in touch with a publisher who asked me to write some easy flute music...I was doing this rather simple composing when my children were very young...so that was my first experience of having my music published.

JT: When you read music in your first degree, did you specialize in any sort of instrument? Did you specialize in composition?

CM: The piano ...piano and singing were really my 'thing' then. I didn't compose at university. It was when I went to music college and heard the results of composer students' entries for composition competitions I thought, as I listened ... and this sounds a bit arrogant of me ... you cannot be serious? Although I wasn't studying composition at the time I made up my mind to enter these competitions and surprisingly kept winning awards which was most gratifying. So, feeling encouraged, I thought I'd better actually go and study composition [laughter] which I did do later.

JT: You mentioned you were a singer or studied singing. Do you feel like that impacts you as a composer?

CM: It possibly does ... I love the voice and I love singing and I feel it's important to treat the voice well, trying to bring about the best effect chorally, vocally. I think in a linear way as well as harmonically.

JT: So, the voice leading?

CM: Yes. When I write for the voice I sing everything through, all parts ... I always want to find out how it might feel to sing, how it lies on the voice, are there notes in the texture which will help other parts to pitch their notes, all that sort of thing. I prefer the idea of giving singers, if I can, an interesting line to sing. I feel choral music should bring enjoyment as well as interest in the part itself. (I've sung quite a few not terribly exciting alto parts in my time!) Of course, if we're talking about renaissance music and polyphonic textures, there's always plenty of interest there, but I think that there is more of a tendency today to think vertically, homophonic-style, which perhaps doesn't encourage melodic writing in the same way. I'm also aware, the more difficult the choral music, the more time is needed to rehearse it. It's a fine line between writing something to stretch and interest the performer and something which isn't going to take hours to rehearse! If one needs to do a lot of rehearsal singers aren't necessarily going to remember what was covered from one week to the next. I often try to write in a way which will be easier to recall.

JT: As a choral conductor, I can vouch that is true.

CM: Do you mean you might conduct something one week and then the following week you wonder why singers aren't remembering what you covered in the previous rehearsal? Brain wipe?

JT: You rehearse the same things! Yes! that certainly is part of it. We have briefly been touching on this as a linear progression from the first question, but my second question is, what factors impacted your decision to pursue a career in composition?

CM: Getting older. Once my children grew up I had more time and found it easier just to shut myself away and get on with doing what I wanted to do. Write. Also, about twelve years ago I gave up teaching at Trinity College in London. (It's now called Trinity Laban (formerly Trinity College of Music) and this meant I could just devote my time to writing music. But there's always a balance to be had, isn't there, between managing financially and pursuing a freelance career. I'm just so grateful to my husband ...a circuit judge, now retired ... who has supported me along the way when I made a decision to stop teaching, or at least to stop teaching in an institution, a possibility. (I do composer-in-residence work and masterclasses but less than before.)

JT: Were there any figures that inspired you to pursue composition or was it just an innate desire for you?

CM: You've probably come across this quote from Gustav Holst who said, " Never compose anything unless the not composing of it becomes a positive nuisance to you." I think we just have to be eaten up with a desire to write if we're going to do it at all. My father again, being the musician he was, was always so supportive and encouraging though didn't live long enough to see how things began to progress after I'd decided to become a composer.

JT: Along the same lines, we have talked about your father being an influence on you, are there other influences that are important in your musical life? Composition teachers in your masters, or composers that you have studied their music or have a particular fondness for?

CM: I studied with three very different composers, all equally wonderful in their own field. I studied first with Joseph Horowitz, a master craftsman. He introduced me to different approaches to orchestrating, ways of thinking imaginatively about instrumental color. I then studied briefly with Robert Saxton, a remarkable composer and intellectually so stimulating. And then with Adam Gorb. Adam is Head of Composition at the Royal Northern College of Music and was really just excellent in every way ... he opened my ears to so many possibilities, ideas I just hadn't thought of before. I owe all three composers ... I had come to composing with a slightly narrow view, that one didn't necessarily need to be 'taught' how to write. I revised my view into something broader ... that one should always welcome new ideas, new ways of doing things and that working with other composers was very crucial to developing oneself as a composer. I still feel that fundamentally one can't 'teach' composition ... there has to be some original creative nugget there in the first place ... but there is always so much to discover from techniques, ideas to learn from composers past and present. I came to appreciate all this as something absolutely invaluable.

JT: I have read, in studying you before the interview, that through your teachers your pedagogical line can be traced to many famous English composers including Ralph Vaughan Williams, Holst, Howells, and all the English Musical Renaissance. Do you feel any sort of connection with those composers?

CM: There is always, it seems, a desire on the part of the listener or reviewer to place a composer somewhere within the music tradition. I'm often surprised when I'm told I sound 'English' or 'British'. But the creative impulse is so subconscious and spontaneous

I would find it difficult to pinpoint my connections. My 'ear' is open to so many different sound-worlds ... Baltic, Swedish, American, Middle Europe, Arabic. In 2018 I wrote a cantata, *Everyday Wonders: The Girl from Aleppo* ... this is based on the real-life story of a Kurdish refugee, Nujeen Mustafa, from Aleppo who has cerebral palsy. She escaped war-torn Syria with her sister, who pushed her in a wheelchair three and half thousand miles through nine different countries. I felt, in order to be true to the subject matter, I should find an idiom within my style of writing that was not literal in its ethnicity but that could, in some way, reflect the sound-world of her journey through Middle Europe. I think whatever the commission as a composer, you are always listening keenly to make the musical language relevant. Going back to your original question, I'm sure Howells, Holst, Vaughan Williams and Benjamin Britten are there somewhere in my musical thinking. I don't ever reject the past ... there is always much which can inform music of today.

JT: Speaking of Vaughan Williams, of course this work was paired with the Vaughan Williams, *Five Mystical Songs*, and another one of your compositions for soloist and orchestra, *Seventy Degrees Below Zero*, was also paired with the Vaughan Williams *Sinfonia Antartica*. Do you think there is a particular reason why your works are often paired with Vaughan Williams?

CM: I hadn't thought about that until mentioned it. I do know that very often conductors perform works by dead composers popular with audiences so as not to alarm them too much with something contemporary! There was a special reason why the *Sinfonia Antartica* was paired with *Seventy Degrees Below Zero* ... it was the centenary of the

British Antarctic explorer, Captain Scott ... my work commemorated his achievement, commissioned by the Scott Polar Research Institute, with a setting of his last letter addressed, To my Widow. Thinking of Tuesday evening's concert, I think it may have been more to do with programming baritone Roderick Williams singing, Vaughan Williams' Five Mystical Songs with choir. He was contracted to perform in the Da Vinci Requiem.

JT: Sure. Makes sense.

CM: Yes. It seems important when programming to make as many connections as possible.

JT: I have talked with Neil some about that.

CM: Yes. What did he say?

JT: He mentioned that it might seem a bit disparate, especially with the inclusion of Ravel, but there is the fact that Ralph Vaughan Williams studied orchestration with Ravel and then I drew his attention (I am not sure that he was aware he may have been I do not know) that you can be traced to Vaughan Williams through Horovitz, I think it is, per my research. There are ties there.

CM: That's really interesting. Yes. What's so fascinating, which we were talking about earlier, is how all of this can be so subconscious. I suppose we always draw from what we know, from what we love, admire, enjoy into our own sphere. You know that lovely story about Vaughan Williams going to study with Ravel?

JT: I know that he went during his honeymoon but that is all I know.

CM: At his first meeting Vaughan Williams showed Ravel some of his work and Ravel seemed rather perplexed by it and suggested that RVW write *un petit menuet dans le style de Mozart*. Vaughan Williams knew he must act promptly and replied, mustering his best French, by saying, “Look here, I’ve given up my time, my work, my friends, my career to come here and learn from you and I’m *not* going to write *un petit menuet dans le style de Mozart* for you!” They got on famously after that. Robust stuff!

JT: Perhaps I should research that.

CM: There is a good book by academic, Roger Nichols called “Ravel Remembered”.

JT: What other composers’ music do you listen to? Both past and/or contemporary.

CM: I listen to anything and everything when I have the time to do so. That’s difficult as there are so many composers I’m drawn to and I feel by mentioning those I particularly like it might seem I’m excluding others. I love Pérotin, with its raw organum, the Renaissance period, Thomas Tallis is very special (nothing quite like the richness of “Spem in Alium”) and an absolute favorite of mine.

JT: That is interesting because a lot of people say Byrd.

CM: That’s true. Though Tallis always seems to have something deeper, more substantial in his music. Is that awful to say?

JT: No, I don’t think so.

CM: It's interesting, my husband loves listening to very early music or Renaissance music and I'll be working in another room and hear him playing the CD of the consort, The Cardinall's Musick, performing Byrd. Do you know The Cardinall's Musick?

JT: I am not familiar.

CM: The director of music at St. Paul's Cathedral, Andrew Carwood, directs The Cardinall's Musick and they're just great. They've recorded all the Byrd Masses. That's my husband's 'go to' CD! But every now and again he will play "Spem in Alium" and because this forty-voiced *a cappella* work is so extraordinary I have to stop what I'm doing and just go and listen. It's a breathtaking sound-world. I do find it generally difficult, though, to fix on favourite composers.

JT: It can be difficult, sure.

CM: Some people are divided between Handel and Bach and for me it's Bach every time! In 2005 BBC Radio Three commemorated Bach with two weeks before Christmas of wall-to-wall Bach ... that was my Christmas present! All his works were broadcast in those two weeks, fantastic!

JT: I love Bach as well. A master. What is not to like?

CM: Yes, I know! The Classical Period, I love so much there too, Mozart, obviously, and working my way through playing many of the Beethoven sonatas was a wonderful experience, love Schubert, so much exquisite writing. The nineteenth century so much to enjoy there, the big Romantic symphonists, Strauss's orchestration.



JT: It is quite adventurous. We were just studying Don Quixote in my class on Romantic Period music history.

CM: With that wonderful opening! How do you conduct that!

JT: Yes!

CM: It must be a nightmare for a conductor! I saw André Previn on television saying "the way you do it, is you face the audience, then you whip round and ..." and the music begins. And there's Gurrelieder. I like to catch performances of this when it's programmed ... it's an extraordinary work. I love the delicacy and color of Debussy and Ravel's piano writing. And then Stravinsky. Stravinsky is a big influence. Also, Bartok and Ligeti, particularly his wind writing. And Messiaen, I love the color and the exoticism of these composers.

JT: Sure.

CM: Today, in this country two of the most significant living composers are Judith Weir (who is Master of the Queen's Music) and James MacMillan. They are very special but there are also very many really impressive and interesting composers emerging in this country now.

JT: It is a vibrant market.

CM: Yes. A full market.

JT: Moving on to compositional process. What do you see as the hallmarks of your voice as a composer?

CM: Oh dear, I really don't know how to respond to that. Perhaps I could reply by framing your question differently? By how I approach writing? I think it may be for others to describe the hallmarks of my compositional style? What do you think?

JT: What do I hear in your music? I do hear a flare for exoticism. Particularly in the *Da Vinci Requiem*. The harmonic language and some of the motifs seem very exotic.

CM: That's really interesting. I know we'll come on to this in the writing of the *Da Vinci Requiem*, but I feel every idea, every set of words, needs an individual response, something different.

JT: That is another thing that I hear in your compositional voice and others have said so as well in reviews and what not. It is your tie to text. That your ability to set text is of a high degree and quite unusual in today's landscape.

CM: Again, that's reassuring! I do feel, really quite strongly, that whatever I set to music must be 'good' text. In theory a composer should be able to set anything at all, a shopping list, just about anything. But then there is never much time in life so why waste it on setting something which doesn't have real meaning, real beauty, something substantial? I also feel, to make a piece really work, that the text needs to be not just 'good' text but the kind one can connect with. I think I can say I really love all the texts I've ever set to music ... I like to squeeze or wring the meaning out of the words. I'm not

really saying this is ‘word-painting’ but more a case of placing words to give special significance in some way.

JT: I suppose a better way to get at this, perhaps, is the next question. Could you describe your compositional process for writing a new choral work? In particular, what elements are most important to your artistic choices?

CM: Ah, right. In terms of the actual process, are we talking about the physical process?

JT: Yes.

CM: With any commission, I’ll spend a lot of time at first just thinking about the whole concept, what will it be, what will the sound-world be like, rather like setting out a theatrical stage. So right from the start I’ll be thinking about the end, about the arch in between, the direction of the work and how it might be conveyed to the listener. And then there is the search for the text. I love this part of the process when everything is possible! I often spend quite a bit of time on this and sometimes consult with one or two very knowledgeable friends to find the best access to texts. (They can be very patient with me as I turn things over in my mind!)

JT: Sure. I sat with Nicholas Dakin at the premiere.

CM: Exactly, yes. Let’s come to him because he was enormously inspired in the way he helped me sort through both the Latin mass and the Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci. I was hoping you might both talk at the concert which is why I put you together!

JT: We did! I got his email address.

CM: The next part of the process is the moment I realize that I can't put off starting any longer! I just have to get on with it. So, I always try to have a reasonable idea of what I'm hoping to achieve before I go to the piano. Oh, to have the skill of a Mozart who could write away from the piano at such speed! Britten, Rossini, a few others, could write without the piano. I think Britten would work in the morning, play it through, then go off for a walk. Marvelous! I can't do that (well I can do the 'go for a walk' bit!) Stravinsky, on the other hand, used the piano. You can tell that by something like the hand positions on the piano of the 'stamping chord' in *The Rite of Spring* ... the same with Michael Tippett. I think there is no virtue in just saying ah, I never use a piano. I do use the piano and write on manuscript paper to begin with. That way I feel like I have freedom to change what I've written, that everything is still possible. I've sometimes written simple things straight onto the computer when I'm in a hurry but find it constraining. Some of my students are fans of 'copy and paste'. Nothing wrong with a bit of copying and pasting, up to a point, but I find it stifles the creative process a bit. When I'm happy with what I have on paper I'll then transfer the notes onto the computer.

JT: When you are at the piano, do you go to the piano with something in mind? Do you improvise and something jumps out at you?

CM: I do both. Often, I begin by improvising and find something I want to capture and explore, so sometimes material comes from improvisation. Other times I have a clear idea of what I want to write and then I check it out at the keyboard.

JT: Does it often go towards the harmonic side or a particular progression, or more the melodic side with particular motifs, or both?

CM: Interesting. There's no formula, nor would I wish there to be one, as to what might be the starting point. I think everything you suggest is possible. The middle movement of Ravel's piano concerto we heard in Tuesday's concert is such a clever piece of writing, isn't it. A simple idea, with its waltz-like left hand, and then the melody, apparently so simple, a change of key shortly after its beginning ... exquisite and so simple, harmony and the melody combined.

JT: So, they are more wed.

CM: Yes, melded together. I tend not to think of harmony, melody (if I have it) and rhythm as separate entities. They work together mostly, not always, of course. Nothing is 'always'. Sometimes, after working on some material, seeing, hearing it transform, I go back to my starting point to see how far the music has changed. For fun, I sometimes think, wouldn't it be wonderful to find a surefire way 'in' to the work in progress and not to have to go through the agony and the struggle to arrive at a place where I'm happy with it. Of course, I know I couldn't be satisfied if it came that easily. Occasionally, ideas just appear effortlessly, but more often I have to bend these ideas into submission to craft something exactly as I wish it to be. I feel every note has to be there because I need it to be!

JT: Sure. Well, I mean, it is more a labor of love to me. I would think that more thoughtful and focused composition would yield a greater result, to me.

CM: Well, I hope if the work means something to me, with luck, it might have some significance for the listener.

JT: Now, the way that you write. Are you a composer who goes every day to compose? Do you compose in blocks and take breaks like that? Or a particular time of day?

CM: Well, my plan is really to keep office hours ... into my music room at nine in the morning and work an office-like day. But the reality is more haphazard. The mornings are precious, I can get much done then. But often there are interruptions...

JT: So more like a nine to five composer.

CM: It never is! It would be really nice if I could do that then I would feel happy about taking time off in the evening or at the weekends. What I usually find happens though, is that the piece, whatever it is, dominates. I will go in as soon as I'm ready to start working on it, and if it takes me through until four o'clock and I have missed lunch that is fine. I might then go back in the evening and sometimes write until two in the morning. Not a very tidy answer!

JT: There is no perfect answer.

CM: It can be a scramble with time. There's nothing like a deadline!

JT: Do you ever go where you just have to be away from it for a bit? Or do you feel that going there every day really helps?

CM: I find if I'm wrestling with an idea that the only way to deal with it is just to keep wrestling until I've sorted it out. Though sometimes, the best solution can be, if I'm working late at night on something, I'll leave it there and go to sleep and maybe in the

morning it will be in a different place. Often is. Strauss said something like that. I do think that the mind can work out all sorts of problems while we sleep.

JT: Sure. That is backed by research.

CM: I know! Great stuff, sleep. So yes. What was your question?

JT: Just do you go through times where you take breaks or...

CM: Ah yes, depends. One of the difficulties at the moment is that my brother and I are looking after my mother, who lives independently, she is actually one hundred years old. So, it means that we both help with shopping and making meals and so on. So, taking occasional breaks from composition is a reality of life just now.

JT: I certainly understand. Regarding text setting, which we have already spoken about a little bit, do you prefer to choose your own since it is a significant factor in your compositional process? Do you normally take commissions where a commissioner has requested for you to set a certain text set or do you prefer to choose it yourself?

CM: Right. If we are talking about preferences, I appreciate most the possibility of choosing of my text and how I do it. There have been times when I have been asked to set a particular text, and I am obviously happy to do that because I feel I want to honor the commission, but if we are talking about a preference I enjoy the freedom of being able to take my own choice on what to set and have different approaches for this. Shall I say more about this?

JT: Sure. Yes.

CM: Of course, the simplest thing is doing the research myself, making my own discoveries, and trying to link it up to what I feel the commissioner wants. Having made a decision, I'll then discuss this with the commissioner and with my publisher, Oxford University Press, to check the copyright situation.

JT: Sure. I know Eric Whitacre got in particular trouble with Sleep.

CM: I know! Sleep particularly. Tony Silvestri, of course wrote the words for Eric when the Robert Frost estate refused permission for the use of the poem "Stopping by woods on a snowy evening" ... may we come back to Tony Silvestri in a minute. What I also enjoy doing is commissioning a poet to write something for me especially. I love this. Writing music is a solitary business so it's great to have the opportunity to collaborate. I've done this a few times, always interesting. If it were of interest, I could give you a list of poets I have worked with?

JT: That would be wonderful.

CM: I'll do that. I just love the collaborative process, the newness of the words, a fresh perspective on whatever the subject might be. I also find it interesting from a commissioning perspective, to discover what it's like having something written especially for me. I've never been disappointed!

JT: That is wonderful. I had a follow-up, but I think you answered it. It was how does text shape your compositional process?



CM: How can I answer that one? That is different isn't it? How does it shape it? Give me some help.

JT: How would a particular text, this is purely hypothetical, impact your choices in harmonic language, melodic language, and form?

CM: Oh right. One of the things about the choice of text is how the pace of it determines the tempo of the work. It's an interesting process, reading through the words to discover whether they suggest fast, moderate or slow. And then the words themselves ... they give structure ... and they inspire. That's probably the fundamental influence, how I respond to the text within the context of the piece. I've set words by the poet and broadcaster, Seán Street called Shipping Forecast in which the text, as one reads it, quotes our actual 'shipping forecast'. It's in italics. Do you have a Shipping Forecast in America? I know there is one for Newfoundland.

JT: I have not seen it.

CM: Well, we have a shipping forecast because we've so much sea all around us!

JT: Yes! Of course!

CM: It's interesting historically. It was started in the second half of the nineteenth century because there were so many disasters at sea in atrocious weather. It was a system of day shapes and lights at ports around the country to help mariners make decisions about how safe it was to sail. The BBC began broadcasting the forecast in 1924 (four times a day) and mariners still listen to it today. It's fascinating and has fascinated people

for years. It's like an incantation and really quite poetic and some of it sounds meaningless, like what on earth are you talking about! But if you're a sailor, then you understand. There is a formula for how it is said and spoken in a particular way. So Seán Street's poem is a response to the weather around the British Isles and just sounds so mysterious on the radio. The italicized words in my choral work are spoken, as if from the radio. A little example of how the text can shape the music...

JT: That is quite helpful. My last question in compositional process is, how did text and literature become so important to you as a composer?

CM: I think my approach to writing is more empirical than analytical ... perhaps that lends itself to being inspired verbally, visually, aurally? I tend not to write music of an abstract nature. I'm so often inspired by something historical, scientific, artistic. Like so many of us, I read much and find that so often literature inspires. When I find something which fascinates and inspires I often want to embed something of the original in the piece in the hope that it might encourage the listener to discover more. I wrote an a cappella work with cello solo called Night Flight which is really a celebration of the American aviatrix, Harriet Quimby. Do you know of her?

JT: I have not, unfortunately.

CM: Now this is interesting. Quite probably the reason you haven't heard of her, I mean we all hear about...

JT: Amelia Earhart.

CM: Exactly. And Amy Johnson ... both ‘disappeared’ And we know about Louis Bleriot. But who has heard of Harriet Quimby? She does at least have a postage stamp in America. She died in 1912. In 2012 I was commissioned to write a piece for, do you mind my expanding on this?

JT: No!

CM: Ok...to write a piece for a French festival, Musique Cordiale. I was trying to think of a way to make that “entente cordiale” between the UK and France in my work. I then discovered that Harriet Quimby had flown her plane from Dover to Calais, across the English Channel and that it was a great success. Louis Bleriot had made a similar journey in reverse, from Calais to Dover, three years earlier, in 1909. He crash-landed his plane! Harriet Quimby made her flight in just under an hour in the time between night and dawn in 59 minutes. The reason nobody’s heard of her is that she flew the day after the Titanic sank which, naturally, dominated the news for weeks. So, it’s not surprising nobody’s heard of her! Later that year in July she gave a demonstration at Boston Harbor and her plane, a Bleriot monoplane, pitched forward, ejecting her with her passenger. An awful death for such a remarkable unsung woman.

JT: Oh wow.

CM: Yeah. She was very gifted, a journalist, she wrote screenplays for films directed by D.W. Griffith also...I think... she appeared in films. Very glamorous, highly intelligent, a clever lady. So, really I felt I wanted people to know about her, a way of celebrating a

remarkable life. The work is about both ‘night’ and ‘flight’ as well as Harriet Quimby’s flight across the sea.

JT: So, it is not just text then. It is all sorts of extra musical influences.

CM: Ideas from history...yes, exactly, it is extra musical influences ...

JT: Moving on to the *Da Vinci Requiem*, what was the genesis of the work?

CM: Well, the commission. Wimbledon Choral Society asked three composers to pitch for the commission ... that’s how it was, I suppose. The choral society approached each composer to ask what we’d like to do for a commission to celebrate Wimbledon Choral Society’s one hundred years of existence. My lovely choral agent Val [Withams] and I discussed this, and we put it together and presented to the choir. I’d been wanting to write a requiem in memory of a dear, close friend of mine who had died recently of cancer.

JT: Is this Helly Bliss?

CM: Yes. I wanted to write a requiem anyway ... there are so many possibilities of expression in a work of this kind, things of deep significance. I was very touched the choral society gave me the commission. What the choir did say, and I think this was right, was that they didn’t want just a plain requiem, that it needed something else to give it focus. I was talking to the Choral Society’s marketing man and mentioned other requiems I knew of ... which had a particular slant ... and happened to mention Judith Bingham’s interesting requiem – *A Shakespeare Requiem* – which makes use of some of Shakespeare’s moving text related to death. As we were talking about this, he

remembered that 2019 was Leonardo's 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death and that the concert was going to be around about the time of Leonardo's death on May 2nd. What a good beginning. Then I remembered that we have the Notebooks! The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci which had been in my family for over seventy years. It was at this point I contacted Nicholas Dakin to ask if he would have time to explore both sets of texts with me, the requiem mass and the Notebooks. I felt that looking at the Notebooks would take quite a time and Nicholas, with his keen eye and quick understanding, I knew, would know exactly what I was after ...some philosophy which would work alongside the mass, something from the bestiary, something from the chapter on flight. He found all the attributions as well. Just so helpful but also fun to work with him on text-gathering.

JT: So, he submitted quite a few text examples?

CM: He did more than that. What he also did was to delve into the structure of the mass. There are twelve sections to the requiem mass ... two of the sections are normally reserved for the burial part itself, *In Paradisum* and the *Libera Me*. I was sure I didn't want to set the *Dies Irae* ... the text doesn't seem right for these times of ours. When the requiem became popular in the nineteenth century it expanded considerably in an extraordinary way in the hands of Berlioz and Verdi. These were not the contemplative requiems of the past but something much more dramatic. Nicholas studied the requiem text and together we picked out the parts which seem right for today and could provide an arching structure. So helpful. Then the Notebooks ... he found many very apposite observations from Leonardo which tied in perfectly with the mass but interestingly found very little reference to God or the Lord in those Notebooks.

JT: Sure, I remember reading your blog post documenting that he...some have accused him of being...

CM: ... of being ambivalent? I think in those times one had to be careful what one said ... especially if your patron was going to be the Church! I loved Leonardo's words and thought how well they would work with the text of the mass. For the third movement I wanted a separate stand-alone moment, just for chorus ... "I obey thee, O Lord" (*Lacrimosa*). This is the most melodic movement in the whole work. I don't like the word "accessible", but it could possibly describe the *Lacrimosa*. And the position of the *Lacrimosa* in the Requiem felt important ... an opportunity for expressivity after the dark edginess of the second movement, "The Virgin of the Rocks". I found a reference Leonardo had made to tears in his Notebooks ... "Tears come from the heart. not from the brain."

I felt, regarding text, it would be good to have something other than the Latin mass and the Leonardo text in the Requiem, something from another perspective, from another artist who was also a poet. I was delighted when I discovered a poem by Dante Gabriel Rossetti (The brother of Christina Rossetti) called, "For 'Our Lady of the Rocks' by Leonardo da Vinci". This was a wonderful find! And what a poem this is, written by Rossetti as he sat looking at The Virgin of the Rocks in the National Gallery.

JT: I was fortunate enough that on Tuesday before the concert, before our rehearsal, I went to the National Gallery and...

CM: Is it there?

JT: Yes!

CM: I thought it had been taken away to be restored.

JT: Perhaps what they have...

CM: Oh, it could be a facsimile or something?

JT: Ah, maybe?

CM: That's interesting. Was it big?

JT: Quite!

CM: In that case, it was probably the real thing. They would have finished the restoration process by now. Yes. I'm so glad you saw it!

JT: I did and read the poem in front of the painting.

CM: Ah, that's wonderful how it's all come together! When I read about Leonardo painting this in the middle of plague-infested Milan it made it all feel what a personal and difficult experience it was. There are such dark undertones in the painting and certainly there are in Rossetti's poem. Do you know there is another Virgin of the Rocks in Paris?

JT: Yes, but it does not include the sea.

CM: In the original version of the Virgin of the Rocks in the Louvre, Paris, Leonardo uses a technique called "sfumato" which means smoky. Everything is soft, blended, more gentle. In the National Gallery, London, version of the painting there is much more

definition, and it has a darkness. In one of the reviews, the journalist suggested that the second movement, entitled, *The Virgin of the Rocks*, perhaps takes the place of the more customary *Dies Irae*. That wasn't a conscious decision on my part but it's an interesting observation.

JT: Yes. It is striking. I must admit when I was reading through the score, at the very beginning, it is a very...striking is the best...

CM: That's good to hear. There's no suggestion of compromise in either the painting or the poet, Rossetti's, response. Both clear cut and dramatic.

JT: With the harmonic language and the angularity of the vocal line—I think very much captures the darkness of the painting and the melancholy undertones.

CM: That's a most welcome response.

JT: I love the movement. A particular choice in setting it for soprano?

CM: The movement is about *The Virgin of the Rocks* so it seemed apposite to write a soprano solo. I'd asked the commissioners whether it might be possible to have soprano and baritone solos in order to give the choir some opportunity for a break in this thirty-five minute work. I think, too, the listeners' ears need variety of timbre as well. So having soprano and baritone soloists at my disposal I needed to decide where to place them in the work to give variety of colour and texture ... I have them in vocal dialogue with each other and the choir in both the first and last movement. I gave, at times, brighter, ethereal material to the soprano in the outer two movements and something darker and edgier in



the second. And then something warmer, softer for the baritone soloist for the sixth movement which could then segue into the last with a continuing warmth, I think.

JT: I think you were right.

CM: Ah, that's nice of you to say that!

JT: You sort of answered this I think, but is this a work you wanted to write before the commission? Any inclination?

CM: I wanted to. Yes. I had decided a few years ago I wanted to write a Requiem.

JT: The requiem particularly, not the da Vinci part but....

CM: It was a requiem, yes. The da Vinci element of it was fortunate in that it all happened at the right time.

JT: You have already mentioned how you became inspired to use multiple text sources in the requiem with the work...the composer that used Shakespeare texts that you mentioned.

CM: Oh yes! Judith Bingham and John Joubert as well. He was born in South Africa, lived in England and died quite recently in 2019. A wonderful composer ... he wrote *An English Requiem*, unapologetically modelled on Brahms' A German Requiem. It is interesting how the requiem has progressed from early times...Renaissance times...when it was very much a liturgical work. In the nineteenth century, the requiem becomes a work for the concert hall ...it has a kind of, "look at me, I'm a Requiem!" flourish to it.

There's Verdi with his dazzling orchestration and Berlioz's *Grande Messe des Morts* (Requiem) with its sixteen timpani, two bass drums, four tam tams and goodness knows what else!

JT: Brahms with his very different take and not using the requiem texts.

CM: Brahms...a very different take, yes. He moves away from convention. And then into the twentieth century, Stravinsky's short, serial Requiem Canticles and Britten's magnificent War Requiem. The War Requiem, I feel sums up all that is imaginative and profound in the writing of a contemporary Requiem. His use of war poetry is a stroke of genius ...

JT: A friend of mine actually just wrote his dissertation [V. Dwight Dockery] on the history of the English requiem or the English burial service, and what is very interesting about it is that from the very beginning, there have been texts outside of the Church that have been included in the English burial service.

CM: Oh, since when? Early times?

JT: Yes, to my knowledge. I will have to check with Dwight [Dockery]. I will let you know. He just finished his document and defended.

CM: I did not know this. That's really interesting. And fascinating you are both sort of looking at things in a similar field.

JT: I am sure I will mention his work in mine but, yes, it has a long tradition of the inclusion of poetic texts from outside the Church.

CM: A kind of humanist approach at an early stage?

JT: Ralph Vaughan Williams, his *Dona Nobis Pacem*, is sort of viewed as a jump off point for the War Requiem in his use of Whitman texts with Latin texts inspiring Britten.

CM: Is that how it is viewed?

JT: There are...there are at least many parallels documented.

CM: That's interesting.

JT: I am conducting *Dona Nobis Pacem* this summer and read a dissertation as a part of my study of the work, and it drew those particular connections.

CM: So interesting. The broadcast of the War Requiem was possibly the last time that the whole country would have listened to music on the radio. It was a nationwide, historical event. And many would have been listening.

JT: A very important work.

CM: Yes, and an important place, the new Coventry Cathedral, I believe the soprano was to be Galina Vishnevskaya but she was denied entry to this country. I don't know how much time Heather Harper had to learn it, but it wasn't much. Heather Harper incidentally, a really wonderful musician who could sing virtually anything at sight, worked with my father. My father, as well as being principal flute at the Royal Opera House ran two chamber music groups and both were made up of musicians who went on to become famous. The mezzo-soprano, Janet Baker sang with him, John Williams, the

guitarist, played for a short time. Julian Bream, another guitarist, too ... he was very well known in this country. I knew Heather Harper because she would rehearse in our house with my father's ensembles... she achieved very famous because Galina Vishnevskaya's visa was denied.

JT: Just the poignancy of Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau being German and singing the baritone role. Striking.

CM: Yes. Bringing it all together post-war. A very significant moment in 1962.

JT: The next question is, with Leonardo da Vinci's prominence as a visual artist, what role did imagery play in your composition of the work? I ask in two sections both in terms of inspiration from da Vinci's art and in terms of the desire to elicit imagery in the mind of the performer and listener.

CM: One of the things so striking in Leonardo's sketches is the particular. It's intriguing there is no theorizing, there is no hypothesizing, he didn't go to university, so everything comes through his eye. He appears to have made his extraordinary discoveries through observation ... such detail. Much is said about the way he never finished anything, he was a procrastinator, he just moved from one thing to another. But even so! So much was streaming through his mind all the time ...how the waves, ripples, move in water, how the bird flies, anatomical dissections, flying machines, contact lenses, tanks. And he was on to the earth moving round an immovable sun over a century before Galileo. Attention to detail fascinates ... it's so important. When composing I feel every little detail matters, how notes are placed, where notes are placed and what the relationship is between words

and music. In some very general way, Leonardo's approach was quite influential in writing this work. Those words, "once you have tasted flight you will forever walk the earth with your eyes turned skyward" just give real direction as to how to set them. It's perhaps obvious but the vocal lines of both soloists soar upwards as do the voices of the choir and the strings, too. The rising scale in the final bars is not quite octatonic, just almost octatonic, and as it ascends phrases overlap ...and the soprano recalls the opening of the work with her, "Leonardo" statement of farewell. Two solo violins disappear into the ether in the closing bars ... *La Prospettiva de' perdimento* - "The Perspective of Disappearance".

JT: One of my ideas about the end...this is strictly me; I do not intend to put this on you...but they do not resolve, and it is almost as if they resolve into the silence. Like if they resolve it is beyond our hearing.

CM: Well yes, there is no final moment ... just a stretching beyond our aural threshold into infinity perhaps, something beyond our understanding?

JT: I thought it was wonderful. I hated that lady had to walk out during that moment but that is what we deal with!

CM: That's a live performance.

JT: It was still a wonderful moment.

CM: That's lovely to hear you say that.

JT: Did any paintings inspire you? Did you look to the Virgin of the Rocks painting?

CM: I did. There was a wonderful Leonardo exhibition in 2012 when many of his paintings were brought together for an exhibition at the National Gallery. (Though he was prolific with his sketches probably only made around 34 paintings). What an excellent experience the exhibition was. It was there that I realized there were two Leonardo da Vinci “Virgins of the Rocks” ... you could stand in the middle of the room and look at the National Gallery painting in one direction, bright, clear cut, with its bright blue sea in the background, and then turn round to see the Paris one which is smoky, faded with its *sfumato* haze...it looks as if it’s got the smoke of French Gauloises cigarettes all over it ... that one has warmth and gentleness. It was an eye opener. They also had a huge panel that was an exact representation of the Last Supper on the wall. And ...I can’t remember whether it was the real thing, the copy of the Last Supper which is housed in the Magdalen College Chapel, Oxford. It’s good to see because it is so clear. The fading original is housed in a convent refectory in Milan I believe ...

JT: I am not sure.

CM: I think it’s there. Yes, the paintings were a source of inspiration ... although they may not have had any great bearing on writing the requiem it was a process of immersing myself in his art.

JT: You have already answered my next question which is, do you have complete discretion over the choice of text? Which of course the answer is yes. Thank you for talking about Nicholas Dakin and his part.

CM: I feel it's important to acknowledge Nicholas as I'm aware he isn't mentioned in the score or the programme. I did ask him about this but he modestly waived the idea off as unimportant. I hope I have made amends for this in another piece we have worked together on, A Prayer to St John the Baptist.

JT: He is a very humble man.

CM: He is and he hides his intellectual weaponry amazingly. He is such an intelligent and clever man.

JT: The next question, and these may turn into very long answers which is perfect, can you speak to the use of melodic motifs in the *Da Vinci Requiem*?

CM: Could you re-phrase that question? What aspect of this are you thinking of?

JT: So, the very opening – which I first looked at the piano part – the figuration uses what I think is a modal mixture type scale which is octatonic, which you talked about earlier, but not quite at the end. That motif appears frequently and ends up being, or I see that it does, it becomes a Leonardo motif and then, if not in that form, at least suggestions of it appear elsewhere.

CM: That's interesting because that wasn't a conscious decision. I just decided how I wanted the Leonardo phrase and, in a way, it informs other parts of the movement. So those intervallic relationships are in my mind, rather unconsciously again, and I've extended and retracted them according to where these phrases are. I can't really explain why the opening is the way it is other than I wanted to set the scene in a contemplative

way and the ‘turning’ motif just felt like something underlying, always moving forwards. but with serenity. It is a sort of praying, rocking figure ... I think the program note says something about the ‘telling’ of beads...

JT: The rosary beads. In my research, I looked at parts of The Leonardo da Vinci Notebooks, and in the section about the perspective of disappearance, da Vinci talks about being in a boat equal distance from a shoreline and a mountain and one appearing closer than the other.

CM: I think I have read this, yes.

JT: I was wondering if that image helped conjure that rocking motif because that is the first thing that I thought about.

CM: That’s interesting because I have read that and I remember thinking, that’s a clever assessment to make in terms of distance and what you observe. I can’t give you a proper answer to that one. I suppose I was thinking more how a circular idea or motif, something turning like a wheel, can bring comfort and reassurance in extreme or difficult times.

JT: Of course, you intentionally pulled the O Leonardo bit back for the final movement.

CM: That’s right. Full circle.

JT: Informally, there are also parallels with the two...well you could speak to it better than I can,

CM: No! It is good for me to know whether it worked, you know.



JT: You see parallels between the soprano and the bass movements. The baritone, the solo movements being second movement and sixth movement, almost not really palindrome but...

CM: Yes, it's structured a bit like a palindrome, or an arch. When I was considering the form of this extended work I felt it was important to have a clear structure in place, a shape which would give direction or momentum to the work. I was intent on keeping the listener engaged and felt that, as well as having a firm design in mind, it was important that each movement should have its own identity, its own character. That each movement should contrast with the movements either side of it. So the first movement, unsettled but meditative, progresses through to the central movement, the *Sanctus*, with its brightness and vitality, and then folds inwards back to contemplation, but this time with an ethereal lightness in the *Lux Aeterna*. The opening movement, with its tranquility, is followed by the dramatic contrast of the soprano solo in the second movement ... the words are pungent and dark. It seemed right the third movement needed to offer something sweeter, reassuring and melodic, to the listener, something people could follow the line of because I think...

JT: Sort of a reaction to No. 2...back the other way.

CM: That's right. The third movement gives the listener a moment of repose with its expressive melodic lines. After which the *Sanctus* breezes in with joyfulness and energy. I have made sonorous, gentle settings of this text in other masses but felt there needed to be a moment of uplift in a work which could, if not careful, bring unmitigated gloom!

JT: It is somewhat of a dance really.

CM: Well, that's nice! Yes, lots of syncopation to push forward ...

JT: We will talk about rhythm in a bit .

CM: Of course. Then the *Sanctus* has at its heart the *Benedictus* which brings a moment of reflection. The orchestral accompaniment is more soloistic here, to lighten the texture. It is much more wind orientated and gives the brass a break before returning to the *Hosanna*, a reprise of the opening material. I feel the *Sanctus* could be described as the apogee of the work, if that's the right word?

JT: Absolutely

CM: The keystone, perhaps ... when one looks at an arch the keystone is dead center, flanked on either side.

JT: It is the most contrasting as well. More harmonically stable and...

CM: It is ... I mean it's very direct, very upfront in G Major. The previous movements have indulged in darker keys but perhaps this movement could be described as one to bring hope and joy to the listener with its bright tonality. There is only so much contemplative text in a requiem and as composer one always wants to keep one's audience engaged if at all possible. The *Sanctus* feels the right moment in the requiem to bring a very different mood to the work. And in the next movement, the *Agnus Dei*, it seemed the right time to make use of the lower instruments of the orchestra with their darker, more somber sound. At points in this movement there is a little falling phrase,

slightly chromatic, perhaps a little awkward to sing, followed by a low bass note on the contrabassoon.

JT: No, I love it! Then the bass note after is wonderful.

CM: Yes, that falling phrase, so often repeated, was important in this context as the words themselves are repetitive. I hope it has an imploring feel to it, that phrase. Later in the *Agnus Dei* the soprano soloist takes the Leonardo text and by giving the words to the soloist over hummed unaccompanied chords I hoped the words stand out. Nicholas found the text in Leonardo's Bestiary (The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci). I would love you to see the whole of that quote, it is lovely and rather surprising how it continues ...I think, with this movement, I must have had something of the Russian Orthodox liturgy in my mind...

JT: It is very thick.

CM: Yes, thick and low. If I had basso profundos I would have got them in there! [laughter]. This movement offered an opportunity for a different choral texture, with the moments when the choir is either unsupported or just sustains a hum underneath the soprano solo. I think it opens up the texture. I feel it's important, in an extended work, to vary the choral texture to give the listener relief. One wants to avoid monotony! Today, there never seems enough time for contemplation ... this is an attempt to restart the connection.

JT: That soprano solo is very interesting, and I had planned to ask you about it later. Particularly, I find interesting the syllabication of “sees” and the re-articulation of the vowel. Is there any particular...

CM: Hmm, a reference to an older vocal technique ...

JT: I figured...

CM: Again, it wasn't a conscious decision to use it ... but I felt this re-articulation of the vowel 'e' sound gives emphasis to the word, 'sees' ( I find it particularly pertinent, thinking of how much entered Leonardo's observant eye). Monteverdi was probably the first person to use this vocal technique and it is often used in contemporary works for dramatic effect. I like to use a technique like that when I can integrate it in a meaningful way and this seemed right. It is really all about the word “sees” ... and this is followed by the words, “the supreme instance of humility in the lamb.”

JT: Perfect! Thank you. The last movement of course, not only does the motif pull back in the Soprano, but the opening lines of the chorus also reflect the opening motif.

CM: Yes, you have it. I wonder, is that just a compositional device rather than a text device? I think it's more compositional ... I like to refer back to motifs and phrases already used as I think this can be helpful to the listener ... it makes a connection.

JT: So, to hang it together?

CM: Yes, together. That's why it's there, it's more to do with the construction of the piece.

JT: Not necessarily to allude to the *Kyrie* text?

CM: Not particularly because in some ways I feel that job has been done, but here it's in a different context.

JT: I also love the harmony there. The sparkle, the dissonance of the women's voices. It shimmers.

CM: Oh, that's great! I always hope...

JT: Lovely.

CM: That of course is fun because on the page in the vocal score there is nothing to indicate what's going on. None of the flying around from piccolo and the other instruments. It's an interesting dilemma, how do you make a score playable for rehearsal and then make it orchestral as well. Playing semiquavers doesn't work orchestrally, well you can make it work but it's contrived and a little clumsy. But you do need something like that for rehearsal...a tremelando works orchestrally but not pianistically.

JT: Since we are on that subject, if people desire to perform the work...I know there are instances where people perform works not with the orchestral accompaniment whether they can afford it or not. Is this a work that you would feel comfortable with the piano?

CM: Yes, and I would absolutely endorse any conductor or choir wanting to perform the work in this way, just simply, I'd be all for it. I hope I've written the work in such a way that it gives a good amount of color and as a pianist I try to use the keyboard in as imaginative way as I can. I do appreciate not everybody these days has the budget to do

the orchestral version ...I do have plans, by the way, to make into a chamber orchestra version. Though making a reduction will be challenging as I shall have to give up some instruments! But it will be possible and probably quite fun to do. Probably single wind/doubling, horn, trumpet, strings and harp. My issue might be whether to have one or two percussion players ... there are moments when they both play.

JT: I did notice that the percussion was doable to players for the performance. So, you are thinking of...or unless I missed it?

CM: At the moment, it is for two players and I am thinking how to reduce it ... I shall find a way round this ...

JT: When I first looked at the orchestration and the amount of percussion used; I was interested to find out how many percussionists it took to perform it. I think the percussion works wonderfully. Particularly, the glockenspiel with the sopranos and the vibraphone. The vibraphone is such an interesting color.

CM: That is interesting and of course, now that's in the piano score, that's movement six with the baritone ...

JT: Yes, I think so. So, there are plans for a chamber orchestration?

CM: Yes. I will probably do it this year.

JT: Ok. Smaller choral forces?

CM: Yes, I think it was absolutely lovely to hear a hundred and fifty or so sing it. Because of the size of the choir a symphony orchestra was necessary but I think most choirs these days number more like eighty... or fewer... it all needs balancing with the number of strings and if one has fewer strings, it makes economical sense to reduce the wind, but perhaps have doubling instruments. The harp is vital, I couldn't do without it in this context. I know that it's quite usual, when reducing orchestration to include the organ if it's for a requiem but I don't think I shall. I think using an organ can present venue problems because few concert halls have organs in tune and, conversely, churches don't always have the space for choir and orchestra. There will be a performance for choir and organ alone in the UK in December 2020; in 2019, shortly after the premiere, the conductor, M.B.Krueger, head of choral activities at Metro State University, gave a workshop in Denver on the *Da Vinci Requiem* and invited singers and conductors to sing through with just piano. In November 2020 the premier of the reduced orchestration of the *Da Vinci Requiem* will be given in Stockholm by the Gustaf Vasa Kammarkör, conductor Lars Fredén, alongside Jocelyn Hagen's *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci*.

JT: Oh ok! Well, we have already talked about some of your decisions in texture, voicing, the use of solos, and a bit about instrumentation. Are there...Oh, the bass and cello slides in movement no. 2 are striking! I loved them! When I first...you know you see the jumping in the piano score and then I looked at the orchestral score and saw that, but the first time I heard it, it was surprising. It is a very moving sound. Are there any particular ideas behind that?

CM: The text is so intense and extraordinary, and I feel there's a suggestion that not all is as it might seem, that some things are sliding downwards into the abyss. That is why the soprano has these little 'falls' at the end of the phrase ... almost like being sucked into the ground. It's a kind of motif, I hope I haven't overused it . . . too many then the music could become mannered. For me, it was about color and a 'pulling', underlining 'gravity', in every sense. This second movement plunges downwards so that on arriving at the *Lacrimosa* in the next movement there should be an upward surge. That's my hope! Like a burial, we bury those we love deep in the earth but then the spirit rises ... just my thinking behind the relationship between these two movements.

JT: That is lovely. Thank you.

CM: It is interesting you ask these questions because a lot of it is subconscious but by asking the questions it prompts me to think, "ah, so that's why I did it!"

JT: Are there any general...this is just a catchall question...any general remarks you have for those considering programming the requiem or any other thoughts about it you hope listeners or performers will take away? It is a very catchall question I just want to make sure that you have an ample opportunity to speak about the work how you would want to.

CM: I suppose, basically, I hope this work will mean something to people at any stage of their lives. The dedication is in loving memory of a dear friend but it is also for all those who grieve. Death touches us all ... the work, I hope, binds the religious with the humanist elements in Leonardo's text. I found people I spoke with after the premier interesting in their responses ... apart from being lovely about the work (very nice of



them!) each person had a different ‘favorite’ movement. I find that quite fascinating because perhaps that suggests there might be something there for everyone who hears the work? One thing ... thinking of your ‘catchall’ question ... might be to do with ‘direction’. We’ve discussed the structure, which I feel is very important with its underlying framework, but I also want there to be a sense of moving forward, moving through, moving on, moving upwards, even? Direction and structure. I remember the British film director, Ken Loach, saying, “from structure comes substance.” That’s very telling.

JT: Perfect! I did neglect to ask about harmony in the work. Your ideas behind choosing the particular scales and harmonic language that you did. We have talked about the opening motif and the one that appears in the end being a very peculiar scale that is almost octatonic but not. It is a very interesting language. When I first was looking at it, it seemed to me as the juxtaposition of Phrygian and Lydian mode together almost.

CM: It’s odd, isn’t it, how we can write something because it feels like the right idiom without actually analyzing why that should be and then later, give it more attention and find there is a sort of organic consistency there. Expressiveness ... I’m aware of the power of expressivity of appoggiaturas, dissonance, tension and release ... how all this can give a real depth of meaning to the music. I like to experiment with tonal relationships, scale formations. As you were saying earlier, some differences can be startling ... when the *Sanctus* arrives in, as it were, the broad daylight key of G Major ... then there’s a difference.

JT: Sure. The lowered second scale degree and the raised fourth to me are particularly. The pull towards down and the...

CM: Exactly and it's that pull towards the two most important notes in the Western scale, the tonic and dominant and yet those relationships you mention are both suggestive of something more Middle Eastern or Spanish/Moorish.

JT: Exotic, like we talked about earlier.

CM: Ah, thank you for identifying these things!

JT: So, you did not think about that in terms of...I suppose da Vinci is Italian so that is not particularly exact

CM: I would love to say I'd thought of that myself, but in fact, no. But I suppose what we're looking at is what happens creatively in the subconscious. I give a lot of thought to what, who or where I'm writing about and how this might affect my musical language. There's so much which can emerge from thinking around it all, some things just draw me in.

JT: Do you feel that it is at all connected with not...of course the works are not connected...but your use of the exotic modal language in *Everyday Wonders: The Girl from Aleppo*. Do you feel like in your subconscious that carries? That is a fairly recent work.

CM: Yes, I wrote *Everyday Wonders: The Girl from Aleppo* in 2018. There are some Middle Eastern influences there to tie in with the background of the piece. In another *a*

*cappella* piece I wrote a few years ago, *The Lord is Good*, I know I've used the flattened second and the raised fourth a fair amount. Perhaps it's becoming a bit of a thumbprint!

JT: Every composer has them.

CM: They do, yes.

JT: I certainly don't think of it as a weakness.

CM: I like the resulting tension from these scalar relationships. In *The Girl from Aleppo* as well as implying middle eastern harmony in the keyboard and the voices I've given the solo violin quasi-Arabic material ... not actually based on any particular mode, just suggestive.

JT: The concept of exoticism. The Phrygian particularly has that sort of Arabian character.

CM: Yes, the flattened second.

JT: That is all very lovely. Thank you. My last question is, how do you see the *Da Vinci Requiem* fitting in to the larger the Requiem genre? We talked about that earlier and you mentioned that it is a bit different than these large nineteenth century large Requiem statements.

CM: Those works are wonderful and have a special place in the concert repertoire of choral societies. But I think the more contemporary requiems draw on softer more humanist material for text. The days of *Dies Irae* seem to have passed. Contemporary

British requiems include works by John Rutter, Bob Chilcott, Gabriel Jackson, Judith Bingham, John Joubert ... they all seem to offer opportunities for meditation, comfort, both within and outside of an ecumenical context. I felt the Leonardo text might offer a parallel approach to grieving set alongside the mass. I thought Leonardo's unconventional view of life and death might provide something for people who come at it from an agnostic point of view and those who might need the certainty of the liturgy might be buoyed by the more familiar framework.

JT: So, it will work for everyone.

CM: I'm hoping it's an inclusive work ... something for everybody, perhaps? I immersed myself in Leonardo's philosophy chapters in his Notebooks, fascinating stuff ... he was obsessed with work, trying to get the most from every single day, sleeping little. I think his idea that if you spend a life doing everything you possibly can then you may die well is powerful. (*Since a well spent day makes you happy to sleep, so a well-used life makes you happy to die.*)

JT: It seems to be, as you talked about your compositional process, that seems to be a concept that resonates with you. The idea of working hard everyday.

CM: All to do with endeavor, isn't it ... a desire to do the best one can, a desire to write 'good' music. If one looks at composing from a gender perspective, I think one shouldn't be obsessing about whether a composer is male or female but whether it is 'good' music and something an audience will engage with?

JT: It is interesting that you say that. One of my possible questions...I was going to ask if you...I phrase it this way...As a great composer who is a woman in field dominated by men have there been challenges and/or advantages as a part of that?

CM: I always hope that a performer, promoter will select my work because they like it and see a value in it though I do know that sometimes my music will be performed because there's a desire to include work by a woman composer. Occasionally, perhaps, funding can be more forthcoming (looking at this in a practical way) by being gender inclusive. I'd be a bit concerned (especially after 2018, when Britain was celebrating the centenary of the suffragette movement) if the flourish of people performing women composers had only done so as a gesture. I hope the interest in women composers continues. But sometimes one hears talk of 'neglected' women composers (there are neglected male composers, too) being performed because they've had little very little exposure. And in these cases, no matter the gender one can often hear why!

JT: You seem to echo the sentiment of Jocelyn Hagen. I do not know if you are familiar with her work but Jocelyn Hagen is an American composer and she, in a blog post, I think it was on International Women's Day, she said something to the effect of "I want my works to be programmed because they have value to the listener and if you do not feel that they have the worth to stand by the other things on your program do not program my music."

CM: Wow! What did you say her name was?

JT: Jocelyn Hagen. She wants to be performed because she is a good composer not because she is a female composer.

CM: Tell me more? I mean is she a....

JT: She is from North Dakota, I think

CM: Is she a well-established composer?

JT: She is up and coming. She was at ACDA. She and her husband, Timothy Takach, they have started up Graphite Publishing and they somewhat publish their own things. I know she is a friend of Abbie Betinis on Facebook.

CM: Oh, that's interesting. Abbie Betinis is very well-known and often performed here.

JT: We have been, my supervisor Dr. Alicia Walker, I think is particularly fascinated with Jocelyn Hagen as a composer. This year we have done two works by her.

CM: Does she write mainly choral music or perhaps for all instruments as well?

JT: Mainly a choral composer, I think.

CM: I need to find out much more about American women composers. We should be hearing more of their work here in the UK.

JT: Sure. I suppose my only other question would be do you feel that you are a choral composer or do you....

CM: Hah! I just feel I'm a composer who loves writing for any combination, voices or instruments, separate, together. But I do feel a special empathy for the voice, that's true ... I love singing and I love to see how choral music brings people together and can bring enrichment. I feel singing with others (or alone) is vital to one's well-being. I embrace the choral world and all choral music! But I do enjoy writing instrumental music as well ... I think it can open up exciting possibilities from performers which would be more difficult for a singer to achieve. I think writing for the voice needs special care and thoughtfulness as the notes have to be 'found', they are not 'there', ready-made, as they are on an instrument.

JT: The mechanics are much different.

CM: Yes, exactly. I always hope people will continue commissioning me to write instrumental music, though, as well as choral. The next piece I'm writing is an organ work for Rebecca Davy at Bruton Parish Church in Colonial Williamsburg, I find that fun! I derive such pleasure entering the sound-world of a new instrument, enjoying the colors that it provides. I think writing for organ is just like that. I hope people think of me as being able to write anything! Much of my instrumental music is published by Friedrich Hofmeister, in Leipzig, Germany. Hofmeister's early listing included Beethoven, Chopin and Liszt amongst others.

JT: Beethoven is I'm sure at the top of the list.

CM: Yes. In the sixth movement, in the *Da Vinci Requiem*, the text I use is pure Leonardo...it's the only movement in the whole work where I just use his words. All the

other movements are either from the Latin mass or a mix of Latin and Leonardo. In this movement, “O you who sleep”, I saw an opportunity to explore something binary ... sleeping and waking, life and death. And because of this binary connection I experimented with the juxtaposition of major and minor. Throughout this movement there is a sort of ...

JT: of a D sharp/D natural thing.

CM: Yes, the tonality hovers between B minor and G minor.

JT: If you will permit me, I have marked in my score, I almost said, I was looking for key relationships between the movements.

CM: Ah right, I didn't think particularly about the relationship between movements.

JT: I did not necessarily come up with any...except maybe I was wondering maybe if there was a connection with da Vinci's name as a perhaps moniker and...

CM: That would have been good, missed an opportunity there!

JT: Here, my score marking concerning the key here is “B something”.

CM: Well, yes so it is B major/minor... there's a pivot between B and G ... the harmony circles around those two centers. Then there is a return to the tonality of A in the final movement.

JT: The final movement is A.



CM: An unconventional circle? So, an A tonality in the opening movement, D in the second, E in the third, G in the fourth, followed by E in the fifth, B in the sixth then lastly A. A rise and fall of keys.

JT: There is my answer. That goes back forth with the idea of descending and rising.

CM: Yes, that's right, perhaps almost palindrome-like?

JT: Harmonically, I find the work is occasionally...I do not use static as a bad word but some of the...particularly the first movement...is quite harmonically static. You know you center on that A. The A pedal lasts for a long time and when you depart the key relationships are not necessarily classical in any sort of way and they do not...

CM: It's basically on a pedal A until there's a shift in character but still with the same motion. I think there is a relationship between the F and then also C then the movement returns to bright A major.

JT: Sure. You do not necessarily follow a more quintessential mood to the dominant sort of thing. It explores other key relationships which I like.

CM: Perhaps, unconsciously, I try to avoid the tonic dominant/relationship . . . it can sometimes pin things down too much ...

JT: Quite a bit.

CM: I like to keep harmonic options open wherever possible.

JT: The work is also quite rhythmic. It is legato in a lot of sense but in context of the legato articulation, it is quite rhythmic... lots of syncopation. I know as a singer, singing through the lines, some of them were challenging at first in the sense that they do not...they are just rhythmically interesting.

CM: Yes, you would have to think about...

JT: Yes. You have to count.

CM: It took me a little while to work out how to drive the *Sanctus* forward ... the anacrusis going over into the first beat of the next bar does, I think ... it gives a propulsion to the movement. These things don't always occur straightaway when writing.

JT: Sometimes the duple versus triple in the first movement can be tricky...making sure that the duplets are long enough.

CM: I think that helps move it all onwards ... there is always a danger ... you mentioned the word ... of things becoming "static". The change of meter, twos against three, keeps things flowing. Yes, something to move it onwards and I think two against three is one way of doing this. Again, this isn't a conscious decision, just an instinctive desire to keep the momentum.

JT: There is actually a performance review about your music that I have read that talks about your music having a particular rhythmic verve and vitality. I would say that it is definitely the case in the *Da Vinci Requiem*. It is quite rhythmically inventive at times and the use of different meters like the first meter in the second movement is what...5/4?

CM: Yes, that's right.

JT: It then goes to 4/4 and the idea of...you would not know just listening to it...but the use of 5/4 in the *Lacrimosa* is interesting. I think not having the sixth beat propels it forward, as well. Some of it is in 6/4 but the absence of the sixth beat, I think...

CM: It helps to move things on, yes. Otherwise, it could lack forward movement, something I wanted to avoid.

JT: It does not languish throughout, it moves.

CM: That's good to hear!

JT: Requiems, the subject matter and the type of writing that is sometimes done, especially contemplative pieces of any kind, it does have a tendency sometimes to be....

CM: Just long white notes?

JT: Yeah!

CM: I'm quite conscious of that and wanted to find a way of countering this.

CM: It's always interesting, when orchestrating, how you can add in different rhythmic inflections, as in the sixth movement. In the vocal score the accompaniment is in 6/8 but by adding an inner part for the clarinet in semiquavers it helps propel things forward, I think. I know we touched on this earlier but I thought much, when writing the requiem, about how to bring contrast to each movement, something to make a difference. And we talked, too, about composers who have influenced me or who I'm drawn to but there are

artists who have cast an influence, as well. One, well perhaps my favorite 20 century artist, is Paul Klee. Do you know his work?

JT: I am not familiar, but I will have to look it up.

CM: I do commend him to you! Paul Klee was a musician as well. He was a violinist, his parents were musicians, there was always music in the family, they lived near Bern, Switzerland. Music flows through his painting. He played in the City of Bern Orchestra which was a rather mediocre affair. There's a nice story about the distinguished cellist, Pablo Casals, who was invited to play with the orchestra. After an evening with the orchestra he left, deeply offended by its collective lack of expertise and decidedly dodgy intonation, saying, *Ah, c'est terrible de jouer avec cet orchestra!* (Ah, it's terrible to play with this orchestra!)

JT: I have read his textbook on orchestral conducting.

CM: Goodness, really? I had no idea he'd written that. Well Pablo Casals was offered another chance to play with that orchestra and unsurprisingly turned it down but he was good friends with Klee and when he looked at one of his paintings said, 'I can't say what piece your 'orchestra' is playing, but I know what key it's in.' What's so fascinating about Paul Klee is his love of music and how music affected his art but what is also so very interesting is that Klee's art has been a point of inspiration for many composers ... Judith Weir for one ... Judith Weir is our Master of the Queen's Music; her Klee inspired piece is 'Heroic strokes of the bow' which references Klee's 'Heroic Fiddling'. I've written a work based on Paul Klee's work and ideas ... Dream City. It's an instrumental

piece written for the same combination as Ravel's Introduction and Allegro. (String quartet, harp, flute and clarinet). A lovely combination. Paul Klee even referred, in his paintings, to musical terminology like counterpoint, polyphony. His works offer such variety throughout his artistic life ... even towards the end, when he could barely hold a paint brush ... he died in 1940 from a wasting disease which left him in great pain and an inability to move his hands. He lost all flexibility and dexterity and he...

JT: It was not ALS?

CM: What's that?

JT: Lou Gehrig's disease.

CM: It could be? I need to...

JT: It is not just hands...

CM: Alright. I think it is when the body starts to sort of solidify, possibly scleroderma.

JT: Yes, I think that is ALS. I forget what the letters stand for, but the muscles all tighten and eventually even the heart.

CM: I'll look it up ... I should know. What I find fascinating about Klee's art is the sheer explosive variety of it all ... he has an extraordinary range of imagination. He's the one who said, "A drawing is simply a line going for a walk" ... In my Dream City the second movement is called "Walking the line" ... I played with the idea that the instruments

were just like an artist's pencil, zig-zagging a line all over the paper. If you look at some of Klee's sketches, you will see just that ... a weaving, zig-zagging line.

JT: What type of composition is this? This is the instrumental ensemble? Ah, you just said it forgive me.

CM: Yes, Dream City. Another artist, Kandinsky, friend of Klee's, you will probably know, was a synesthete. Quite a few artists and composers were synesthetes. Scriabin called himself one, though I'm not convinced ...

JT: Debussy, I do not know that Debussy said he was, but people assumed that he was.

CM: Right, Messiaen certainly said he was. Kandinsky is interesting ... a few years ago, I was commissioned to write a piece that was for a synesthete pianist, Helen Reid, and she also engaged a synesthete artist to paint while she was playing the pieces.

JT: Remarkable.

CM: She commissioned five composers and I related piece to Kandinsky ... it's called *Colour is the Keyboard*. Kandinsky said, 'Colour is the keyboard. The eye is the hammer. The soul is the piano with its many strings.' I structured the piece in relation to Scriabin's color chart.

JT: Interesting. I did not know if she...since she was a synesthete, I thought maybe she would have asked you to compose in certain keys because of their association with her.

CM: She could have done but I think she was quite keen to leave it open so that...

JT: Very thoughtful of her.

CM: I know, actually yeah. In terms of being commissioned to write something, if something is very prescribed that's fine and if it isn't that's fine too ...just different ways of doing things.

JT: I have a colleague who has synesthesia and she is writing her dissertation and the topic is the use of it with teaching piano to students with synesthesia...using the condition to the advantage of students who have it.

CM: So would that be a matter of understanding the color in terms of sound of a key?

JT: Well, it is all different. There are different types. My friend is one, that it is the written image, so the written key of B flat major is that. For her it is not...she can hear something and not know what key it is in and not necessarily get a color, but if she sees B flat major on the staff, she sees it in whatever color.

CM: That sounds similar ...I do see some things in color, yet I don't think I'm a synesthete ... what I see is not consistent. But I do see the scale in my mind's eye in color and know that what I see, others wouldn't. It's idiosyncratic. For me, A is green and B major, yellow, D major has to be blue and G is obviously orange! Oh and C Major is red ...

JT: Sounds like synesthesia to me. Interesting. Do you feel like that, for lack of a better word, colors your choice of key?

CM: Well I suppose in some ways ... there are qualities of some keys which suggest colour, I think.

JT: It makes sense for G major with movement five being orange and bright.

CM: Right, and E major I always feel is a really bright key.

JT: I am particularly fond of D flat major. I love D flat major. I do not have a perfect picture of anything but there is a warmth to D flat major.

CM: There is, isn't there . . . do you know of William Harris's *Faire is the Heaven*?

JT: I am not sure that I do.

CM: That's in in D flat major . . . it's such a beautiful piece.

JT: Morten Lauridsen's *Sure on this Shining Night* is in D flat major and wow...that opening...even though the piano accompaniment beginning is quite simple it is...

CM: The only one I know is Samuel Barber...*Sure on this Shining Night*. Do you know that?

JT: Yes.

CM: Isn't that wonderful?

JT: Yes, absolutely. Morten Lauridsen set the James Agee text as well. It is lovely. You can look it up on YouTube. Well, thank you so much for allowing me to come to your



home today and have this conversation with you. Thank you also for writing such beautiful music which has been so enriching to me.

CM: It has been a delight to talk with you and thank you for your kind words. I look forward to our next meeting.

## APPENDIX B

### INTERVIEW WITH NEIL FERRIS

On May 6th, 2019, I was fortunate to sit down and interview Neil Ferris, the director of the Wimbledon Choral Society, over lunch between rehearsals leading up to the premier of the *Da Vinci Requiem*. As the conductor of the premier, Ferris was the leading authority on the *Da Vinci Requiem* and was quite familiar with her music, as McDowall is a patron of his professional chamber choir, Sonoro. Ferris was gracious in giving up his on private time between long rehearsals to discuss McDowall's music and the *Da Vinci Requiem*. JT denotes the author, Jantsen Touchstone, and NF denotes Neal Ferris. The interview was edited for grammar but not content.

JT: Good afternoon and thank you for being willing to speak with me between rehearsals.

NF: No problem at all.

JT: First question, what was your involvement in the genesis of the work?

NF: For the choir's 100th birthday in 2015, we decided to commission a work. We decided to commission it in our 100th birthday with a view to performing it a few years down the line. After that, I came up with a suggested short list of composers, with a few other trusted colleagues, I did some canvassing for who would be the right person to ask for this major commission. There are a few of us on the choir's committee that were tasked with finding the right person and Cecilia was on the short list. We narrowed it

down to three in the end and we chose Cecilia. I have known Cecilia about ten years, and she is a patron of my professional chamber choir,

Sonoro. I have loved her music for a long time, and it seemed the perfect fit because I knew she wanted to write a requiem mass. I was also keen, and she was amenable to having some other

texts drawn in that would reflect the right mood for each movement with choosing more modern and poetry and in English. I think whereas religion was culture as well, so everybody would know the requiem mass and what it meant up to twenty or thirty years ago. Now, culture is different is from religion, but we all have spirituality. So, I wanted to draw in an English text that would tuck you in to what each section of the requiem mass was saying. The other side of that was our head of marketing was looking at anniversaries corresponding to 2019, when knew it would be performed. He suggested to Cecilia, a few things, and one of them was Leonardo da Vinci, and she said “Ah! I have got these notebooks!” and it went from there.

JT: As far as her selection of text, did the choir have any sort of influence in that or were those all her decisions?

NF: No, we just let her go.

JT: What specific choral/conducting challenges do you feel that the *Da Vinci Requiem* presents?

NF: The first thing to say is, Cecilia has judged it beautifully because it is challenging enough but it is equally not patronizing either. It is achievable. You feel like you can get hold of it early enough, but there are still challenges. Pitching challenges, rhythmic challenges, and the challenge for the conductor is to get the tempi right because although

there is only one tempo marking that is faster, the *Sanctus/Benedictus*, if you get each tempo right it does not feel like lots of slow movements and that is what is so clever in the writing. The challenge is to prepare it well, make sure that all the dissonances are built up very cleverly, the voice leading is superb, and you can teach a lot by triads. There are a couple of movements that she piles a couple of triads together, lots of A major, F minor, E minor, and most of the tricky bits are just built up through those.

JT: So aggregate tertian harmonies?

NF: Yes, but each part on the page it does not necessarily look like that, so you have got to just sort of draw them in and say it is simpler than it looks.

JT: What do you feel are the highlights of the work?

NF: Ooh! Well, the major highlight is the text. The texts that Cecilia has chosen match beautifully with the requiem mass, each movement has its own emotional contact. I am so delighted that that has worked because sometimes when you put an English text with a Latin liturgical setting it can seem a bit twee or a bit naff, but they are powerful, beautiful, and reflective. That is the ultimate highlight. It is perfectly formed the structure is superb, there are particularly beautiful moments. The *lacrimosa* as a stand-alone movement is very beautiful.

JT: I hear that is a planned to be published also as a stand-alone.

NF: Yes definitely. Also, what I like is that she has not given the English texts to the soloists and the Latin texts to the choir. The choir gets some of the English texts as well, so there is dialogue going on all the time. It is quite, there are operatic elements to it as well in terms of character. How she has really clever, the two solo arias are very dramatic in character and form.

JT: What are your observations about the marriage of text and music within the *Da Vinci Requiem*? I ask because my document focuses or I hope it will focus on the marriage of text and music with Cecilia McDowell, which seems to be a highlight or her compositional style.

NF: She sings through every part and you can tell. All the phrase lengths are judged beautifully. It is immediately singable without being saccharin and that is what I love. Do you know what I mean?

JT: Yes! Very much so.

NF: That you can tell she sings through all the parts. It just lies there, very cleverly done.

JT: What factors contributed to the works pairing with the Ralph Vaughan Williams *Five Mystical Songs* and the Ravel *Piano Concerto in G* for the premiere?

NF: Some of this serendipity when you are looking to balance it, as in what the music tastes like, to produce a balanced whole. Now, we were programming before I ever saw a note of Cecilia's piece. But, bear in mind, that her piece has a baritone soloist and I knew we had secured Roddy Williams who is an amazing baritone. Also, I did not want the choir to have to take on too much else. We needed to sing something else, but I did not want us to take on too much and that seemed a perfect fit. The small link between Ravel and Vaughan Williams, they were both ambulance drivers in the war and Vaughan Williams went to Ravel a bit for lessons in orchestration, so there is a bit of a tie-in there. As it turns out, with Cecilia's perspective of disappearance, at the end of a couple of movements but particularly at the very end, you know the sinuous ascent somewhere. It is a perfect mirror for the Vaughan Williams, in which a lot of movements angelic ascents towards heaven or the last one, the triumphant ascent in a blaze of D major and so it

mirrors it beautifully. Although, Vaughan Williams is an agnostic. He is still really bought in to a lot of the George Herbert poetry. He could celebrate what it was to have faith and conviction, his wife described it as a cheerful agnosticism.

JT: I have also heard that he really respected the Bible and the sacred texts of the faith as monuments of literature.

NF: Yeah that is why he really got into the George Herbert texts. Yeah, so it ended up with the perfect mirror.

JT: Were you also aware that Cecilia McDowell can be traced to Ralph Vaughan Williams among others in the English Musical Renaissance in terms of pedagogical history? Though, I am sure is the case of many composers just because of the Royal College of Music and that history.

NF: You can hear bits of Vaughan Williams in the *Da Vinci Requiem*.

JT: Do you have any specific instances in mind?

NF: The semi-chorus at the end of the *Agnus Dei*. You can hear elements the G-minor Mass in that, especially in terms of texture.

JT: What are the highlights of the orchestral parts and how it weds with the choral and solo writing?

NF: Mm! She is imaginative with percussion. There are a lot of colors there without being outrageous about how many percussion instruments are used. She is very clever with that. You have glockenspiel, vibraphone, bass drum, there's a tambourine, and a triangle, as well. There is lots of interesting percussion textures. The solo wind writing is superb, and there are lots of different colors in the strings. She punctuates things with bits of *pizzicati*. So much color and detail so it really matches the Ravel. The color and the

detail are superb, and also, she cleverly does not over-score. So many composers over-score for choral or solo writing but she does not over-score at all. She is very clever and disciplined about that.

JT: I noticed the orchestra is not extremely large as far as the strings and the winds. It is really a classical-sized orchestra.

NF: That was a deliberate decision to keep it to a sort of Beethoven size orchestration.

JT: But with the addition of percussion for...

NF: So, the percussion is extra but again, she's been imaginative in the doubling instruments. So, you have bass clarinet, contrabassoon, and *cor anglais*, I think. I cannot remember. I might be confusing that with the Ravel. The doubling of instruments-she is very clever with as well.

JT: This is not specifically about the work, but what do you feel are the hallmarks of Cecilia McDowell's compositional style?

NF: She writes superbly to her brief. She has a lightness of touch about what she does and an economy of ideas, but she is not afraid of going to dark and really profound places and that is what I really respect.

JT: You certainly hear that in the requiem. Very good. Those are all my questions at the moment, thank you!

NF: It's a pleasure. Do contact me if you have any follow-up questions.

APPENDIX C:  
TEXTS AND TRANSLATIONS

1. *INTROIT AND KYRIE*

*Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine,  
et lux perpetua luceat eis.  
Te decet hymnus, Deus, in Sion,  
et tibi reddetur votum in Jerusalem:  
exaudi orationem meam,  
ad te omnis caro veniet.  
Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine;  
et lux perpetua luceat eis.*

Eternal rest give unto them, O Lord,  
and let perpetual light shine upon them.  
A hymn, O God, becometh thee in Sion,  
and a vow shall be paid to thee in Jerusalem:  
hear my prayer;  
all flesh shall come to thee.  
Eternal rest give unto them, O Lord,  
and let perpetual light shine upon them.

O Leonardo, why do you toil so much? (Windsor 12700 and Codice Atlantico, 71r)  
Because movement will cease before we are weary of being useful. (Aphorisms, 685)  
Shadow is not the absence of light: merely the obstruction of luminous rays by an opaque body.

(Ms 2038, Bibliothèque Nationale, 22r)

We are all exiled living with the frame of a strange picture. (attrib. L d V)

*Kyrie eleison.  
Christe eleison.  
Kyrie eleison.*

Lord, have mercy.  
Christ, have mercy.  
Lord, have mercy.

2. *THE VIRGIN OF THE ROCKS*

Mother, is this the darkness of the end,  
The Shadow of Death? And is that outer sea  
Infinite imminent Eternity?  
And does the death-pang by man's seed sustained  
In Time's each instant cause thy face to bend  
Its silent prayer upon the Son, while He  
Blesses the dead with His hand silently  
To this long day which hours no more offend?  
Mother of grace, the pass is difficult,  
Keen as these rocks, and the bewildered souls  
Throng it like echoes, blindly shuddering through.  
Thy name, O Lord, each spirit's voice extols,  
Whose peace abides in the dark avenue



Amid the bitterness of things occult.

For 'Our Lady of the Rocks', by Leonardo da Vinci  
Dante Gabriel Rosetti (1828-1882)

### 3. I OBEY THEE, O LORD (*LACRIMOSA*)

I obey thee, O Lord, first because of the love which I ought to bear thee: secondly, because thou knowest how to shorten or prolong the lives of men. (Foster III. 20v.)  
Tears come the heart, not the brain. Our body is subject to heaven, and heaven is subject to the spirit (Tr. 65 a)

*Lacrimosa dies illa,  
Qua resurget ex favilla  
Judicandus homo reus.  
Huic ergo parce Deus:  
Pie Jesu Domine, dona eis requiem  
Amen.*

Full of tears will be that day  
When from the ashes shall arise  
The guilty man to be judged;  
Therefore spare him, O God:  
Merciful Lord Jesus, grant them eternal rest.  
Amen.

### 4. *SANCTUS* AND *BENEDICTUS*

*Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus  
Dominus Deus Sabaoth.  
Pleni sunt caeli et terra gloria tua.  
Hosanna in excelsis.*

Holy, holy, holy  
Lord God of Hosts.  
Heaven and earth are full of thy glory.  
Hosanna in the highest.

*Benedictus qui venit  
in nomine Domini.  
Hosanna in excelsis.*

Blessed is he who cometh  
in the name of the Lord  
Hosanna in the highest.

### 5. *AGNUS DEI*

*Agnus Dei,  
qui tollis peccata mundi,  
dona eis requiem, sempiternam requiem.*

Lamb of God,  
that takest away the sins of the world  
grant them rest, eternal rest.

One sees the supreme instance of humility in the lamb (Bestiary, Codice H:11r)

### 6. O YOU WHO ARE ASLEEP

O you who are asleep, what thing is sleep? Sleep resembles death.  
Ah, why then do you not work in such a way that after death you might resemble yet a perfect life, when, during life, you are in sleep so like the hapless dead?  
(Codice Atlantico 76, v. a)

What is it that is much desired by men, but which they know not while possessing? It is sleep.

(L d V Notebooks 1 56 [8] r)

Since a well-spent day makes you happy to sleep, so a well-used life makes you happy to die.

(Codice Trivulziano 28 a)

## 7. LUX AETERNA

*Lux aeterna luceat eis, Domine:  
cum sanctis tuis in aeternum, quia pius es.  
Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine,  
et lux perpetua luceat eis:  
cum sanctis tuis in aeternum, quia pius es.*

May light eternal shine upon them, O Lord,  
with thy saints forever, for thou art merciful.  
Eternal rest give to them, O Lord,  
and let perpetual light shine upon them:  
with thy saints forever, for thou art merciful.


Once you have tasted flight, you will forever walk the earth with your eyes turned skyward, for there you have been, and there you will always long to return (attrib. L d V)  
O Leonardo.

*Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine,  
et lux perpetua luceat eis.*

Eternal Rest give to them, O Lord,  
and let perpetual light shine upon them.

## APPENDIX D

### PROGRAMS



UNIVERSITY OF  
**SOUTH CAROLINA**  
School of Music

*presents*

**JANTSEN B. TOUCHSTONE, conductor**

**in**

**DOCTORAL RECITAL**

**with**  
**Graduate Vocal Ensemble**  
**Sungsil Kim, piano**

**Saturday, December 8, 2018**  
**6:00 PM • Shandon Presbyterian Church**

Te Deum <i>for the Empress Marie Therese</i>	Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809)
Mirjam's Siegesgesang  Rebecca Loar, <i>soprano</i>	Franz Schubert (1797-1828)
Rejoice in the Lord alway  Keri Lee Pierson, <i>alto</i> Dwight V. Dockery, <i>tenor</i> Don Kirkindoll, <i>bass</i>	Henry Purcell (1659-1695)
Fern Hill  Caroline Miller, <i>mezzo-soprano</i>	John Corigliano (b. 1938)

*Mr. Touchstone is a student of Dr. Larry Wyatt & Dr. Alicia Walker.  
This recital is given in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Conducting.*



**GRADUATE VOCAL ENSEMBLE**

Soprano

Emily Burch\*-  
Sarah Floyd  
Shekinah Frieson  
Juliana Galletti  
Rebecca Loar  
Emily Mason  
Keri Lee Pierson  
Alyssa Tavarez  
Diamond Tyler

Alto

Kirstina Collins\*-  
Natalie Gilbert  
Evy Johnson  
Caroline Miller  
Lauren Tomme

Tenor

Elliott Brown  
Dwight Dockery\*-  
Christopher Moore-

Bass

Don Kirkindoll\*-  
Matt McCall  
T.J. Turner

\* Fern Hill Solo Quartet  
- Fern Hill Semi-Chorus



UNIVERSITY OF  
**SOUTH CAROLINA**  
School of Music

*presents*

**JANTSEN B. TOUCHSTONE, conductor**

**University of South Carolina Men's Chorus**

**in**

**DOCTORAL RECITAL**

**with**

**Almond Ponge, piano**

**Monday, April 15, 2019**

**7:30 PM • Main Street United Methodist Church**

<i>Jubilate</i>	Will Todd (b. 1970)
No More Sorrow	Will Todd
<i>Kyrie</i> from <i>Missa mater patris</i>	Josquin Des Prez (c.1450-1521)
<i>IV. Gloria in Excelsis</i> from <i>Lux: The Dawn From On High</i>	Dan Forrest (b. 1978)
What We Need Is Here	James Deignan (b. 20th Cent.)
Ben Kirby, <i>tenor</i>	
I carry your heart with me	David Dickau (b. 1953)
Will the Circle Be Unbroken	arr. J. David Moore (b. 1962)
Almond Ponge, <i>tenor</i>	
Robert Walker, <i>tenor</i>	
Jesse Kaiser, <i>bass</i>	

*Mr. Touchstone is a student of Dr. Larry Wyatt and Dr. Alicia Walker.  
This recital is given in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the  
Doctorate of Musical Arts degree.*



UNIVERSITY OF  
**SOUTH CAROLINA**  
School of Music

*presents*

**JANTSEN B. TOUCHSTONE, *conductor***

**UofSC UNIVERSITY CHORUS**

**in**

**GRADUATE CONDUCTING RECITAL**

**with**

**Sungsil Kim, *piano***  
**Matthew McCall, *organ***

**Thursday, April 25, 2019**  
**4:30 PM • Shandon Presbyterian Church**

Blessed Are The Peacemakers

Will Todd  
(b. 1970)

Die Nachtigall

Felix Mendelssohn  
(1809-1847)

On My Dreams

Jocelyn Hagen  
(b. 1980)

Kaisa-isa Niyan

Nilo Alcala  
(b. 1978)

Rejoice in the Lamb

Benjamin Britten  
(1913-1976)

Karly Fitch, *soprano*  
Jerricka Jenkins, *alto*  
Kalen Mattocks, *tenor*  
Jacob Cordes, *bass*

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**School of Music**

presents

## **Summer Chorus I**

**R. Vaughan Williams' *Dona Nobis Pacem*  
&  
Randall Thompson's *The Testament of Freedom***

Larry Wyatt and Jantsen Touchstone, conductors  
Jerry D. Olson, Jr., piano  
Jordan DeRouen, organ

Serena Hill LaRoche, soprano  
Michael LaRoche, baritone

Friday, June 28, 2019, 7:30 p.m.  
Sunday, June 30, 2019, 4:00 p.m.

USC School of Music Recital Hall



UNIVERSITY OF  
**SOUTH CAROLINA**  
School of Music

*presents*

**JANTSEN B. TOUCHSTONE, *conductor***

**GRADUATE VOCAL ENSEMBLE**

**in**

**GRADUATE CONDUCTING RECITAL**

**with**

**Cameron Dennis, *piano***

**Tuesday, December 3, 2018**

**6:00 PM Recital Hall**

Da Vinci Requiem

Cecilia McDowall  
(b. 1951)

*La Prospettiva de' perdimenti* (The Prospective of Disappearance)

1. *Introit and Kyrie*
3. *I obey thee, O Lord (Lacrimosa)*
5. *Sanctus and Benedictus*
7. *Agnus Dei*

Amy Touchstone, *soprano*  
Andrew Mitchell, *baritone*

*Mr. Touchstone is a student of Dr. Alicia Walker. This recital is presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Choral Conducting.*





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**Grad Vocal Ensemble:**

**Soprano**

Hannah Brown  
Becky Loar  
Stephanie Villamizar

**Alto**

Natalie Gilbert  
Sungsil Kim  
Becky Ostermann

**Tenor**

Christopher Moore  
Almond Ponge  
Taeyoung Seon

**Bass**

Anthony Chu  
Malachi Doren  
Jesse Kaiser  
Jacob Otis